

# The 34th Infantry Division at Cassino and Anzio: The Role of Operational Art in the Italian Campaign

A Monograph

by

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## Abstract

The 34th Infantry Division at Cassino and Anzio: The Role of Operational Art in the Italian Campaign, by MAJ Jason M. Merchant, Iowa Army National Guard, 51 pages.

World War II's Italian Campaign emerged out of the Allied strategic debate of 1943 and was the crucial link between North Africa and a cross-channel invasion into northwestern Europe. Although the United States considered Italy the 'third European front,' the campaign unified the United States civil-military discourse and shaped the German strategic situation for the Allied invasion at Normandy in 1944. The campaign also pitted the Allies in a bitter contest against weather, complex terrain, and a series of fortified German defensive lines. The pressing strategic aims and operational objectives demanded that the division commanders achieve tactical success against overwhelming odds.

This monograph answers how Major General Charles "Doc" Ryder, the 34th Infantry (Red Bull) Division commander, accomplished his tactical objectives to contribute to the broader operational and strategic goals. Under the US II Corps at the Gustav Line, Ryder accomplished this by modifying his operational approach, extending his operational reach, and delaying the 34th ID's culmination by extending his organization's endurance. From the Cassino front to the US VI Corps' Anzio breakout to the pivot Rome, Ryder led the 34th ID through five distinct phases. He accomplished that by anticipating and planning transitions, and mitigating risk to his mission and force.

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## Acronyms

ADRP	Army Doctrine Reference Publication
AD	Armored Division
ID	Infantry Division
FEC	French Expeditionary Corps
MG	Major General (US)
LTG	Lieutenant General (US)
RCT	Regimental Combat Team
SSF	Special Services Force
US	United States
WW II	World War II

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## Introduction

The Battles for Cassino and Anzio during the Italian Campaign were decisive to the eventual German capitulation in the Mediterranean Theater during World War II (WW II). From January to June 1944, these Allied attacks into the “the soft underbelly of Europe” drew German resources from the strategically important Eastern Front and presented multiple dilemmas to German strategy.<sup>1</sup> It was there that the emerging doctrines of modern amphibious operations, joint fires, and coalition warfare evolved, setting conditions for a cross-channel attack in western Europe. Indeed, it was there that modern war became reminiscent of the World War I stalemate in the trenches, a place that shaped the leaders of these battles, and one not to revisit. Despite dynamic advances in doctrine and technology during the interwar period, the armies of these most advanced nations clashed in an environment that nullified many of those gained advantages, as will be seen in the battle of Cassino that only moved forward by raw human effort and will.

However, the Italian Campaign of WW II also presents several forward-looking applications as demonstrated by the multinational coalition force that integrated joint capabilities to defeat a determined peer threat in a complex environment. The divisions and corps that comprised the US Fifth Army and the British Eighth Army faced a hybrid threat in mountainous and urban terrain while operating in multiple domains. As one of the divisions of the US II Corps and later the US VI Corps, the 34th Infantry Division (ID) contended with these environmental factors, task organization changes, and a degraded information environment during the battles of the Winter Line and Anzio.

Literature about the Italian Campaign, particularly the operations at Cassino and Anzio, often criticizes the actions and decisions of Fifth Army Commander Lieutenant General (LTG)

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Blumeson, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations: Salerno to Cassino* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1993), 5, 455.

Mark Clark and his corps commanders. British historian John Ellis wrote that the six-month battle to break the Gustav Line was characterized “by the sufferings of ordinary soldiers and the ineptitude, on the Allied side at least, of their commanders.”<sup>2</sup> Such indictments portray a campaign that lacked intelligent design fraught with a lack of flexibility, innovation, and situational understanding. At a glance, solutions seem limited to direct methods such as Fifth Army’s broad frontal attack against the formidable Gustav Line. Matthew Parker, another British historian who also wrote *The Battle of Britain*, captured the essence of the cost in human capital from similar perspective with the claim that “only the bloodbaths of Verdun and Passchendaele or the very worst of the Second World War fighting on the Eastern Front can compare to Monte Cassino.”<sup>3</sup> Other times, the operational plan seemed so unsynchronized and lacked any confidence of success that the Allied tempo seemingly passed the initiative to the ever responsive German commanders, as seen in the piecemeal attacks along the Gustav Line and the buildup of the Anzio Beachhead.<sup>4</sup>

In actuality, the situation along the Cassino/Anzio fronts was more problematic than perhaps these reductionist assessments about the senior commanders and their operational plans indicate. The notable Prussian military theorist, Carl von Clausewitz wrote that “Everything in war is very simple, but the simplest thing is difficult” and it is these difficulties that accumulate to produce a “kind of friction that is inconceivable unless one has experienced war.”<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, success in the Italian Theater depended on the ability of the fighting divisions to translate operational plans into tactical orders and direct battlefield effort to ultimately achieve the aims of the campaign.

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<sup>2</sup> John Ellis, *Cassino: The Hollow Victory* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984), xiv.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew Parker, *Monte Cassino* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), xiii.

<sup>4</sup> L.K. Truscott, *Command Missions: A Personal Story* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1954), 327-331.

<sup>5</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, edited by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 119.

This monograph will explore how the 34th ID, a Midwest National Guard division commonly known as the Red Bulls, accomplished that very challenge and demonstrated operational art through the arrangement of tactical actions in time, space, and purpose. It will examine the division's planning and actions within II Corps' operational approach in the first battle of Cassino, from securing the first tenable crossing of the Rapido River until relief from their foothold on the Gustav Line in Cassino and the adjacent heights. Next, the study will examine how the 34th ID reconstituted and transitioned to VI Corps' Anzio front to participate in the Allied attack that would lead to the capture of Rome.

There is an old military adage that the higher level is "all screwed up," and it seems to apply to this period of the Italian Campaign. Regardless of the soundness of the higher plan or the complexity of the military problem, there is still a mandate to work within the higher commander's intent to accomplish the mission. For this phase of the Italian Campaign of WW II, how did Major General (MG) Charles "Doc" Ryder, the 34th ID commander, arrange tactical actions to accomplish his assigned missions, regardless of flaws in the higher plan? What were the elements of operational art, as understood today, that facilitated success and which crucial elements were missing? How did his staff plan and synchronize collective efforts in an operational environment that degraded every warfighting function's capability? Ultimately, was the mental effort in planning commensurate with the herculean efforts and sacrifices of the individual soldiers who fought at Cassino and Anzio?

The answers to these questions will demonstrate the value of operational art and the costs of ignoring the cognitive dimension of modern warfare. *The US Army Operating Concept: Win in a Complex World*, outlines the plan to ensure that the total army force is "manned, trained, and equipped" to win in land warfare against an "unknown threat in unknown environments."<sup>6</sup> This

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<sup>6</sup> TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1, *The US Army Operating Concept: Win in a Complex World* (Fort Eustis, VA: Training and Doctrine Command, 2014), iii-iv.

concept acknowledges that the army may also have to operate in environments or situations where these programmed advantages are rendered marginal or overmatched. It is for this reason that this portion of the Italian Campaign was selected. The 34th ID's plans and actions at Cassino and Anzio relied on a flexible operational approach, a controlled tempo, a recognition of culmination criteria, and the phasing of operations and resources. MG Ryder issued orders that enabled subordinate commanders to operate in a degraded communication environment or to react rapidly to transitions, yet with a unified purpose.

## Literary Review

Several detailed accounts describe the critical and costly battles at Cassino and Anzio: who the leaders and units that fought there were, what occurred on the slopes and narrow coastal plain, and when these events took place in the strategic context of the WW II European Theater. Sources used for this study range from official battle studies, personal memoirs, after action reports, and historical accounts.

The battle studies for the Allied side reflect the national personality and contributions of participants of the campaign. Although the Allied coalition in Italy consisted of twenty-six nations by the end of the war, the sources for this monograph are predominantly US and British. The US Army's Center for Military History "Green Books," from *Salerno to Cassino* and *Cassino to the Alps*, provide excellent overviews of the Italian Campaign, emphasizing army and corps level decisions and directives, and divisional tactical actions. The post-war German Military Defense Study program, a coalition staff project, produced battle studies based on official German journals, interviews, and records, which were invaluable in capturing the German perspective.

There are also many useful books written by historians or participant-turned-historians that provide a historiographic lens for framing the Italian Campaign. Cassino veteran Fred Majdalany's *Cassino: Portrait of Battle* and British historian John Ellis' *Monte Cassino* provide excellent overviews of the battles at Cassino and Anzio. Homer Ankrum, a 34th ID rifle platoon sergeant

who received a battlefield commission during the Italian Campaign, wrote his essential first-hand account, *Dog Faces Who Smiled Through Tears*. Colonel Rudolf Böhmler's *Monte Cassino: A German View* provides a first-hand perspective from 'the other side of the hill' on Allied assumptions and actions, as well as the impacts of the operational environment on the Germans in Italy.<sup>7</sup>

Professional papers and memoirs provide the operational commanders' intent within which MG Ryder orchestrated tactical actions. Jon Mikolashek's *General Mark Clark* provided a balanced view of General Clark, informed by personal papers and correspondence. General Lucian Truscott's personal memoir was essential to a complete understanding about the Anzio operation, from inception to beachhead breakout. The 34th ID's "Lessons Learned in Combat," compiled in September 1944, and personal experience papers written by 34th ID leaders in WW II, informed how Ryder's tactical orders were carried out. German Feldmarschall Albert Kesselring, Axis commander for Italy, provided a useful perspective on the construction of German fortifications and personal assessments of both sides in the *World War II German Military Studies, Volume 14*. Lastly, Mark Stoler's works on the Anglo-American relationship in WW II captured the strategic debate that determined an Italian Campaign.

## Methodology

This study will seek to demonstrate how one division commander approached his tactical problem set within a theater of secondary importance. The Cassino and Anzio operations are often treated as two separate fronts loosely joined under an Army command, when by design, they were intrinsically linked by an operational approach. Operational art will be examined from 34th ID's orchestration of tactical actions during this period of the Italian Campaign that was

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<sup>7</sup> Edward Ripley, "About the Author," *Monte Cassino: A German Perspective* (London: Cassell, 1964). Rudolph Böhmler commanded a German "paratroop combat team at the Battle of Monte Cassino and was responsible for the defense of the monastery." After the war, he became a military journalist and editor.

characterized by under-resourcing and synchronizing critical actions, and conflating speed for the principle of tempo. The cost of violating these maxims was enormous with an aggregated 740,000 casualties from all sides over the 606-day campaign, with the heaviest losses occurring at Cassino.<sup>8</sup> While these figures may be incomprehensible to most Americans today, the operational planner must wrestle with the contextual facts of why it happened, understand what was done successfully and unsuccessfully, and identify the “continuities and contingencies” for today’s battlefields to prevent such a costly victory in the future.<sup>9</sup>

Part one of this monograph will establish the strategic context of the Italian Campaign of WW II from the international, national, and coalition aspects. Examining political and military strategy, both Allied and Axis, will reveal tensions between coalition partners and provide meaning to decisions and actions, which is not unlike contemporary coalitions. The strategic objectives for the Italian Campaign provide a critical starting point for analysis of operational art because as Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-0 points out, “Operational art spans a continuum—from comprehensive strategic direction to tactical actions.”<sup>10</sup> The strategic context will also reinforce the interrelatedness between theaters of war and major operations relative to the Italian Campaign. The other component of context is the Italian Campaign’s operational environment with emphasis on the Fifth Army after landing at Salerno in September 1943 until the fall of Rome in June 1944. The operational context will discuss the physical environment, the opposing forces and the situation at mid-January 1944.

Part two of this monograph will present case studies of the 34th ID’s actions during the first battle of Cassino and the breakout from the Anzio beachhead. Each study will begin with the

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<sup>8</sup> Peter Caddick-Adams, *Monte Cassino: Ten Armies in Hell* (New York: Oxford, 2013), 8.

<sup>9</sup> John L. Gaddis, *The Landscape of History* (New York: Oxford, 2002), 30-31. Gaddis defines *continuities* as “patterns that extend across times” that allow the observer of history to draw general conclusions and *contingencies* as “phenomena that do not form patterns” but when they occur they often produce enormous changes.

<sup>10</sup> Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2016), 2-1.

Fifth Army and corps level operational approaches to examine the inextricable linkage between strategic aims, operational goals, and discrete tactical actions. Using the current doctrinal understanding of operational art as the lens, the analysis will examine MG Ryder's operational approach and how he incorporated tempo, operational reach, culmination, phasing and transitions, and risk into the 34th ID's operations.<sup>11</sup> Each case study will conclude with an assessment of relevance for current and future operations.

Part three of this monograph will discuss conclusions about the successful and failed integration of the elements of operational art analyzed and their relevance to current and future operations. The US military, along with interagency and multi-national partners, faces current and future security threats in regions much like WW II-era Italy. Terrain that denies technical advantage, emerging domains of conflict, and ideologically driven state and non-state actors are twenty-first century problems as much as they were for the 34th ID at Cassino and Anzio.

## Historical Context

### Strategic Context

From the outset of WW II, an Italian campaign was not a foregone conclusion, particularly for the United States. Yet, the Mediterranean became the first active theater on the European continent for US and British ground forces against the Axis powers. The Italian Campaign held nuanced meaning for the US and British heads of state, the Combined Chiefs of Staff, and the generals that led the operations in Italy. This strategic debate over an Italian campaign changed the long term nature of Allied relations throughout WW II and was evident in the nuanced operational approach of the Allied commanders in Italy. The strategic context for the Italian Campaign will be

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<sup>11</sup> ADRP 3-0, 2-1. "Operational art is the cognitive approach by commanders and staff—supported by their skill, knowledge, experience, creativity, and judgment—to develop strategies, campaigns, and operations to organize and employ military forces by integrating ends, ways, and means (Joint Publication 3-0)."

framed by a review of the international situation in 1943, an overview of the main alliances, and a discussion about the strategic goals of those alliances and the member nations.

The international situation in September 1943 was one of escalating hostilities as the war in Europe entered its third year and the Allies commenced the invasion of Italy. Acclaimed historian Mark Stoler describes how WW II sprang from the dissolution of the post-World War I international order in his *Allies in War*. Through the 1930s, the authoritarian states of Imperial Japan, Nazi Germany, and Fascist Italy withdrew from the League of Nations, formed the Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis, and through both diplomatic and military maneuver occupied neighboring states. Stoler explained that although the Axis pact was overtly directed at communist Russia, its core ideology was “directed against the entire existing international order and its defenders, most notably France, Great Britain and the United States.”<sup>12</sup> Thus as 1943 opened, the lines had been drawn, the alliances formed, and full scale war raged on the Asian continent, the southern Pacific islands, the Eastern European-Russian front, and North Africa was under control of the Allies.

The main alliances involved in the Italian Campaign were well established by 1943, and besides Fascist Italy’s surrender in September 1943, those alliances would not fundamentally change during 1943 and 1944. As previously mentioned, the Axis alliance was primarily comprised of Adolf Hitler’s Nazi Germany, Benito Mussolini’s Fascist Italy, and Emperor Hirohito’s Imperial Japan. Although Italy overthrew Mussolini’s regime and installed Field Marshall Pietro Badoglio in July 1943, loyal Fascist forces continued to play a marginal role alongside their German allies in Italy and the Balkans.<sup>13</sup> The three great powers of Great Britain and her commonwealth nations, the Soviet Union, and the United States formed the nucleus of the Allied forces that decided on opening a front against Germany through Italy. However, by the end

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<sup>12</sup> Mark A. Stoler, *Allies in War: Britain and America Against the Axis Powers 1940-1945* (New York: Oxford, 2005), 4.

<sup>13</sup> Stoler, *Allies in War*, 204.



of hostilities in Italy, twenty-six nations contributed materially to the Allied victory, including Italian regular and irregular forces.<sup>14</sup>

There are several events germane to the Allies' invasion of Italy in 1943 and the Berlin-Rome response. First is Germany's invasions of Poland in 1939 and France in 1940, the Battle of Britain in 1940, and the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941.<sup>15</sup> These military conquests pitted Germany in "head-to-head combat" with the British, the Free French, and the Soviets; and solicited US support through the Lend-Lease program.<sup>16</sup> Secondly, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 globalized total war by triggering US and British declarations of war on Japan the next day, and a German declaration of war on the United States and a reciprocal US declaration of war on Germany on December 11, 1941.<sup>17</sup> Thirdly, by 1943 the German-Soviet eastern front had become a bitter war of attrition. Although, the Soviets had checked the German conquest of the Caucasus region and recaptured Stalingrad by late 1942, the enormous cost in troops, equipment, and civilian lives continued to mount through 1943.<sup>18</sup> Lastly, the Allies' relatively rapid successes of Operation Torch in North Africa during November-December 1942 and Operation Husky in Sicily during July-August 1943 presented the Allies with the dilemma of competing priorities and approaches for the employment of veteran Anglo-American forces in the Mediterranean.

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<sup>14</sup> Parker, x; Ken Ford, *Cassino 1944: Breaking the Gustav Line* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2004), 20. By the time of the Allied spring offensive in 1944 the coalition contained forces from seventeen nations.

<sup>15</sup> Alan F. Wilt, *War from the Top: German and British Military Decision Making during World War II* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), viii.

<sup>16</sup> Stoler, *Allies in War*, 18-20, 103; Wilt, 176.

<sup>17</sup> John Grigg, *1943: The Victory that Never Was* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980) 9-13.

<sup>18</sup> Grigg, 21-24. Historian Alan Wilt lists the German offensives at the Russian front in "Appendix Code Names": Barbarossa 1941, Typhoon (Moscow) 1941, Blue-Brunswick June 1942, Edelweiss (Caucasus) 1942, Heron (Stalingrad) 1942, Northern Lights (1942), Citadel (Kursk), 1943, Panther 1943, 295-298.

Whatever difference existed between the Allies' individual strategic goals and methods to achieve them in 1943, the three principal states agreed unanimously on the total defeat of Nazi Germany. Then, just as today, multinational operations presented both challenges and benefits at all levels of conflict.<sup>19</sup> A brief review of the 1943 strategic development process illustrates why the Allies converged on an Italian Campaign, how the pursuit of a multi-lateral solution shaped the nature of both wartime and post-war relationships, and how strategic ambiguity impacted operational planning.

There were three significant US-British conferences that shaped Allied strategy for 1943. The key actors of these conferences were British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, US President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and the Combined Chiefs of Staff, British General Alan F. Brooke and US General George C. Marshall. The Casablanca Conference, held January 1943, was characterized by British civil-military solidarity and US internal strategic debates.<sup>20</sup> The key strategic decisions were a continued Mediterranean offensive focused on Sicily (Operation Husky), the postponement of a cross-Channel attack until an unspecified date as forces and resources were amassed in Britain, and the subordination of the Pacific theater to the other agreed upon goals.<sup>21</sup>

At the Trident Conference, held in May 1943 in Washington, DC, the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, having learned their lesson in Casablanca, controlled the strategic debate with a unified US global strategy that was "geared to accomplish American political objectives and capable of receiving interservice support," as well as presidential approval.<sup>22</sup> The Trident Conference

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<sup>19</sup> ADRP 3-0, 1-7 to 1-8.

<sup>20</sup> Stoler, *Allies in War*, 86-91.

<sup>21</sup> Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries*. 100-104. The chief US Army planner of the Casablanca conference, Brigadier General Albert Wedemeyer remarked that "we lost our shirts...we came, we listened and we were conquered," 103. The Combined Chiefs of Staff also agreed to "focus their 1943 efforts on on the U-boat war in the Atlantic, continued aid to Russia, and a combined bomber offensive against Germany," 294.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 118. For further reading on the interaction between the Allies at the international level and the US civil-military and inter-service discourse that shaped the Trident and Quadrant Conferences, refer to

strategic aims were: to postpone the cross-Channel attack until May 1944, to continue Mediterranean operations post-Sicily aimed to “eliminate Italy from the war and to contain the maximum number of German forces,” and expanded offensives in the Pacific.<sup>23</sup> Within this strategic guidance, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Commander in Chief of the Allied Force in the Mediterranean, began planning for follow-on operations after Sicily.<sup>24</sup>

Strategic ambiguity prior to and during Operation Husky delayed Eisenhower’s commitment on how best to match his available military means to achieve the strategic aims of eliminating Italy from the war and containing the maximum number of German forces in the Mediterranean. He developed two broad approaches, one through Sardinia and Corsica into southern France or northern Italy and the other through the Italian mainland then north to Rome.

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Mark A. Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 109-121.

<sup>23</sup> Stoler, *Allies in War*, 120-121. Subordinate Pacific operations included the Solomon Islands, New Zealand, the Marshall and Caroline Islands, the Aleutian Islands, and the Chinese-Burma-India theater

<sup>24</sup> Blumenson, 8-9, 23-24. The Italian strategy debate continued at Algiers, May 29-June 3, 1943, between Prime Minister Churchill, and Generals Marshall, Brooke, and Eisenhower. Churchill favored an Italian mainland invasion post-Sicily, while Marshall felt an Italian invasion “might generate its own momentum and draw in increasing numbers of troops,” detracting from preferred US designs, and Eisenhower offered several military options, but favored a limited Italian invasion over Sardinia.

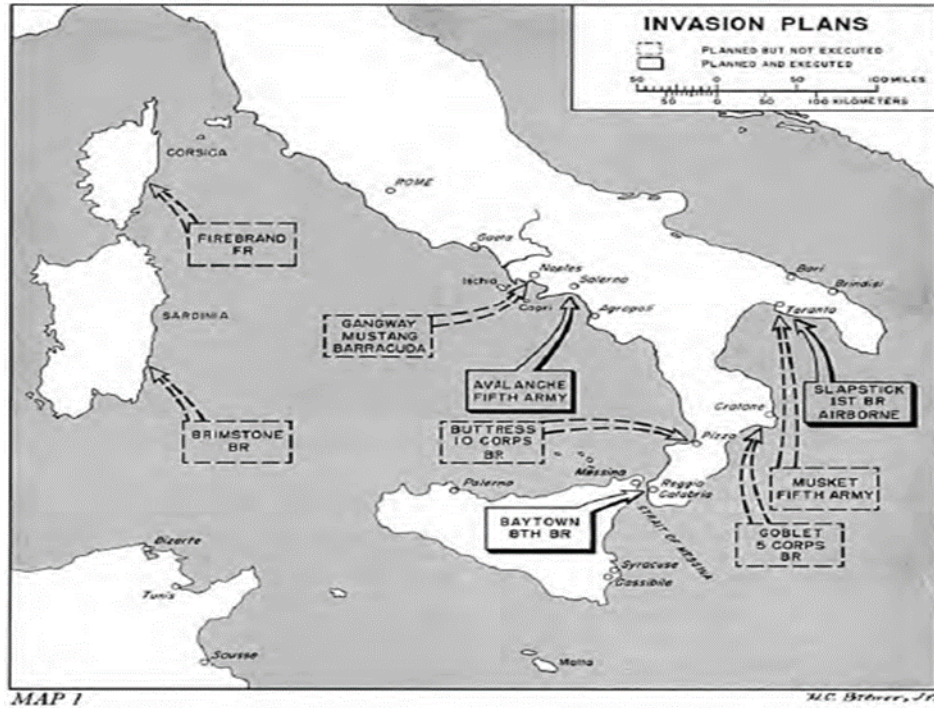


Figure 1. Post-Sicily Allied Invasion Plans. *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations: Salerno to Cassino* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1969), 12.

Eisenhower's plans were based on varied assumptions about German and Italian reaction to Operation Husky, resource constraints in assault divisions and amphibious capabilities earmarked to leave the Mediterranean for the 1944 cross-Channel invasion, and suitable land-based airfields necessary for extended operational.<sup>25</sup> However, by the next Allied strategy conference in August 1943, the Allies nearly controlled Sicily, Italy had deposed Mussolini and installed Marshall Badoglio, who had secretly promised an Italian surrender and break with the Axis if the Allies would invade the Italian mainland to prevent a German occupation.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile along the eastern front, Soviet success at the Battle of Kursk, while the western Allies remained

<sup>25</sup> Blumenson, 12. For further reading on Eisenhower's planning effort after the Trident Conference, see Chapter I, *Toward a Decision*, 9-15. Seven divisions (four US and three British) were to be transferred from the Mediterranean to the European Theater by November 1, 1943 for the cross-Channel build up. Additionally, amphibious shipping in the Mediterranean was marked for transfer to Britain by January, 1944. Finally, considerations for aircraft basing favored an Italian mainland invasion over a riskier invasion of Sardinia to Corsica to Southern France or Northern Italy. The United States refused to commit any aircraft carriers (normal capacity of 160 planes) in the Mediterranean and British aircraft carriers (capacity of 36 planes) were deemed inadequate for operational reach required.

<sup>26</sup> Stoler, *Allies in War*, 123.

uncommitted to a 'second front' for 1943, prompted harsh accusations from Stalin about his allies "insignificant" contributions and broken promises.<sup>27</sup>

The Quadrant Conference, held in Quebec during the latter half of August 1943, would resolve some of this strategic tension and ambiguity. However, the lack of a clear and timely strategy for the Mediterranean beyond Sicily would result in another limited Allied success and time for the Germans to react, just as it had in Tunisia.<sup>28</sup> Stoler captured the essence of the Anglo-American strategic debate that continued at Quadrant in *Allies in War*:

To the Americans, the British were once again being duplicitous and remained more concerned with political gains in the Mediterranean than crossing the Channel and winning the war quickly and decisively. To the British, such charges were not only incorrect but also hypocritical in light of American insistence on maintaining scarce landing craft in the Pacific, rather than transferring them to the European theatre for further Mediterranean action and/or an increase in the size of the Overlord assault.<sup>29</sup>

Despite the competing motives and methods, the Allies confirmed the priority cross-Channel invasion (Operation Overlord) for May 1944, expanded Mediterranean operations into the Italian peninsula, and determined the terms of surrender for Italy.<sup>30</sup> Thus, General Eisenhower initiated the Italian Campaign with General Bernhard Montgomery's British Eighth Army pursuing the Germans across the Straits of Messina at the 'toe,' while LTG Mark W. Clark's Fifth Army departed Tunis and moved to land at Salerno.<sup>31</sup> However, the lack of coordination and cooperation between the two armies during these initial invasions missed the opportunity to cut off the withdrawing German forces in southern Italy. This same mistake would be repeated throughout the campaign as Allied differences at the strategic level permeated operational plans.

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<sup>27</sup> Grigg, 120-121; Stoler, *Allies in War*, 126-127.

<sup>28</sup> Blumenson, 5. Blumenson's critique of the strategic debate of 1943 further clarifies this statement, "Until these decisions were made at the highest level, military planners at all echelons could do little but try to crystallize their thoughts by drafting tentative plans."

<sup>29</sup> Stoler, *Allies in War*, 124.

<sup>30</sup> Blumenson, 435.

<sup>31</sup> Wilt, 206. Wilt points out that Allied strength at the conclusion of Operation Husky was nearly equal between Britain and the United States, at 168,000 per nation.

In Germany, Adolf Hitler had consolidated the civil-military machine under his direct authority in 1938.<sup>32</sup> His primary focus had been on the Soviet front since 1941, but by August 1943, the Mediterranean situation increasingly concerned him. Italian losses in Africa, Greece, and Russia hinted at Italy's waning military capacity and the imminent loss of Axis sea lines of communication in the Mediterranean. To counter Allied success in Sicily, and unsure of their subsequent moves, Hitler moved forces into Sardinia, Greece, and Italy to secure two regions of political, economic, and military significance, the Po Valley basin of northern Italy and Rome.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, the Germans developed plans to disarm Italian forces and assume coastal defenses should Italy capitulate, which they did on September 9, 1943.<sup>34</sup>

Consequently, the Allies' two strategic aims to knock Italy out of the war and contain German forces in the Mediterranean succeeded but it also triggered a resolved German response that the Allies had considered unlikely. By November 1943, Hitler placed all of Italy under Field Marshall Albert Kesselring, who assumed command of Army Group C, while simultaneously moving Army Group B under command of Field Marshall Erwin Rommel to France.<sup>35</sup> This strategic shift favored an active defense south of Rome, where the terrain and ten divisions could best drain Allied strength and thwart momentum towards Rome and the Po Valley.<sup>36</sup> Thus, the stage for the Italian Campaign had been set by Allied strategic ambiguity and debate, subordinated resourcing on both sides, and on one of the most challenging battlefields of WW II.

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<sup>32</sup> Geoffrey P. Mergaree, *Inside Hitler's High Command* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 37-41.

<sup>33</sup> Allied Coalition Staff, *The German Operation at Anzio: A Study of the German Operations at Anzio Beachhead from 22 JAN 44 to 31 MAY 44* (German Military Documents Section, 1946), 2.

<sup>34</sup> Martin Blumenson, *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations: Salerno to Cassino* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1993), 65.

<sup>35</sup> Allied Coalition Staff, 3.

<sup>36</sup> Stoler, *Allies in War*, 128; Blumenson, 69, GMDS, 2.

## Operational Environment

The strategic context demonstrated how Allied Mediterranean strategy emerged from debate and operational opportunities in North Africa, Sicily and eventually Italy, as depicted graphically in Figure 2. The Allied forces that toppled the German and Italian forces in northern Africa and Sicily soon learned that the Italian theater presented complex terrain and harsh weather effects as challenging as the opposing German occupiers. Therefore, an understanding of Allied operational art at Cassino and Anzio requires an examination of the physical environment and the opposing forces in the broader Italian operational environment of 1944.<sup>37</sup>



Figure 2. The Southern Approaches to Europe. *American Military History*, Vol. II (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2010) 136-137.

## Physical Environment

The physical environment encountered in the two previous operational environments bore some useful resemblance to Italy, but paled in comparison to the rugged Italian peninsula and harsh winter weather. North Africa's austere desert mountains, different in form than the Italian

<sup>37</sup> The physical environment will be considered using the elements of weather and terrain found in Army Techniques Publication 2-01.3, *Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield/Battlespace*, Change 1, (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2015), 3-3.

ranges, had allowed novice Allied formations freedom of use for motorized and armored assaults. Operation Husky provided the first Allied glimpse of the narrow coastal plains, jagged foothills, and extensive hydrological systems representative of the northern Mediterranean, but it lacked the fortified defensive belts and determined German counterattacks to come in central Italy.

The Italian peninsula is the predominant land mass in the central Mediterranean Sea, critical to control of the sea lines of communication and basing of large military forces in the region. The 1000-mile-long and 100-mile-wide peninsula is bordered by the Tyrrhenian Sea on the west and the Adriatic Sea on the east. Adjacent to the 'toe,' Sicily rests across the narrow Straits of Messina, while Sardinia and Corsica reside further off the western Tyrrhenian coast. Greece and the Balkan region are only fifty miles from the Italian 'heel' at the mouth of the Adriatic Sea.

The terrain presents numerous natural obstacles, the most significant of which is the central Apennine Mountains. This range forms a "spine" the length of the peninsula, reaching heights of 6000 feet with "a succession of mountainous ribs" descending to the narrow coastal plains.<sup>38</sup> Numerous rivers descend perpendicularly from the central spine on their way to the coast.<sup>39</sup> In the Cassino area, the Rapido, the Liri, and the Garigliano Rivers converge to present a continuous linear obstacle from sea to the central mountains, over-watched by towering heights from the west. The Anzio plain was crisscrossed with an extensive irrigation and drainage network, dotted with hundreds of stone houses, and surrounded by heights on three sides and the coast to the west.<sup>40</sup>

Since Ancient Rome, Italy's mobility corridors dictated the movement of any significant force, which was even truer with the interwar innovation and reliance on mechanization.

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<sup>38</sup> Fred Majdalany, *Cassino: A Portrait of Battle* (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1957), 21.

<sup>39</sup> Blumenson, 322. In the 36th ID area of operations, the Rapido River had vertical banks three to six feet high and was twenty-five to fifty feet apart with a nine to twelve-foot depth.

<sup>40</sup> Ernie Pyle, *Brave Men*, Introduction by G. Kurt Piehler (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 251-252.



On the western side of the Apennines these corridors consolidate to constitute a twenty to twenty-five-mile front, while on the eastern side of the peninsula only a five to fifteen-mile front is possible. In the west, Highway 7 closely followed the narrow coastal plain, while Highway 6, the historic Rome-Naples corridor, passed through the Mignano Gap and into the broad Liri Valley.<sup>41</sup> Scarce east-west corridors throughout central Italy and the central obstacle of the Apennines negated coordination between the east and west fronts.<sup>42</sup> The Germans further complicated the canalized ground lines of communication by destroying road and rail bridges as they withdrew north, while retaining critical transportation arteries in northern Italy.

In this defensible terrain, German Feldmarschall Kesselring constructed a series of fortified defensive lines south of Rome with the German Todt Organization and the forced labor of thousands of Italian civilians.<sup>43</sup> Kesselring used the southernmost lines, the Volturno and Barbara Lines, to control the Allied tempo while the Gustav Line fortifications were completed.<sup>44</sup> The western half of the Gustav Line included two lesser lines, the Bernhardt (Winter) Line to the southeast and the Hitler Line to the northwest. The Gustav Line overlooked the entire length of the broad Rapido and Garigliano River valleys, which spans three miles wide in the Cassino area.<sup>45</sup> Concealed in the heights overlooking the rivers, the Germans constructed steel-reinforced concrete fighting positions that afforded superior observation and employment of direct and indirect fires over well-developed engagement areas. The key to the Gustav line defense was Monte Cassino, a Benedictine monastery guards the mouth of the Liri Valley and overlooks the town of Cassino,

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<sup>41</sup> John S.D. Eisenhower, *They Fought at Anzio* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2007), 53. The mouth of the Liri Valley, along the Rapido River, is five miles wide.

<sup>42</sup> Majdalany, 21.

<sup>43</sup> Ennio Silvestri, *The Long Road to Rome* (N.p.:Il Gabbiano, 1994), 76. The Todt Organization was a German military engineering group under Adolf Hitler's Third Reich.

<sup>44</sup> Allied Coalition Staff, 6.

<sup>45</sup> Majdalany, 3.

Route 6, and the Rapido crossing points.<sup>46</sup> Between Anzio and Rome, the Caesar Line was tied into the Alban Hills to form the final defense for Rome.

Weather effects during the Italian winter of 1943 and 1944 formed another critical component of the operational environment during the opening moves of Cassino and Anzio. The realities of the Italian winter quickly dispelled any imaginations of a Mediterranean resort. By the First Battle of Cassino, heavy winter rains had swollen the Rapido River and increased its current in excess of twelve feet per second, making bridging operations not only difficult, but deadly. In conjunction with the blown bridges, the Germans opened sluice gates and destroyed dams on the Rapido and Garigliano Rivers, creating muddy roads and marshy plains that impeded motorized or armored vehicle movement up to a mile from the river.<sup>47</sup> Additionally, since November 1943 the exposed troops endured strong winds, sleet, and unusually cold temperatures that inflicted scores of non-battle injuries to the exposed troops.

### Opposing Forces

At the beginning of January 1944, Feldmarschall Kesselring had a total of over twenty divisions in Italy under the Tenth Army, commanded by Generaloberst Heinrich von Vietinghoff, and the Fourteenth Army, commanded by Generaloberst Eberhard von Mackensen.<sup>48</sup> Vietinghoff's Tenth Army defended central Italy with the Gustav Line under the XIV Panzer Corps in the west, under Generalleutnant Frido von Senger, and the LXXVI Corps defended the Adriatic side to the east.<sup>49</sup> Von Senger held his sector of the Gustav line with six divisions, von Vietinghoff retained

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 53. Majdalany explains that the German defensive preparations at the Gustav Line in the Cassino area included houses that were "blown up and turned to strong-points" and "waterways were diverted to create floods."

<sup>47</sup> Eisenhower, 66.

<sup>48</sup> Oscar Pinkus, *The War Aims of Adolf Hitler* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2005), 383; GMDS, 5-9; Ford; 26-27. Division readiness varied from recently activated, reconstituting, or combat effective.

<sup>49</sup> Blumenson, 312-33; GMDS, 7; Parker, 361. Blumenson recorded the troop strength as follows: Tenth Army (150,000) between XIV Panzer Corps (90,000) and LXXVI Corps (60,000); I Parachute Corps (24,000); Fourteenth Army (70,000); hospitalized or other status (25,000).

two divisions for Tenth Army's operational reserves near Anzio, and Kesselring retained two divisions for Army Group C reserves near Rome.

By January 1944, changes within the Allied Mediterranean command structure ensured the most experienced senior leaders moved to Britain for the preeminent Operation Overlord that would prove detrimental to the Anglo-American coalition in Italy. British General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson became the Supreme Allied Commander of the Mediterranean on January 8, 1944.<sup>50</sup> British General Sir Howard Alexander had commanded 15th Army Group since the fall of Tunisia and was responsible for the Italian Theater.<sup>51</sup> Alexander commanded two armies in Italy, the British Eighth Army, commanded by General Sir Oliver Lease, and the Fifth Army commanded by LTG Mark Clark.<sup>52</sup> Although separated by the Apennines, both armies opposed the Gustav Line with Lease on the eastern front and Clark on the western half of the peninsula. Clark arrayed the British X Corps, II Corps, and the French Expeditionary Corps along the Gustav Line, the VI Corps, at Naples, was earmarked for the Anzio operation while the 45th ID was kept as his Army reserve. The 34th ID would fight under II Corps during the first battle of Cassino and after a brief respite to integrate replacements, would move to the Anzio front under VI Corps for the breakout to Rome.

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<sup>50</sup> Blumenson, 294. US General Dwight D. Eisenhower left for Great Britain on January 8, 1944 for his appointment as Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Force.

<sup>51</sup> George F. Howe, *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1993), 665-667.

<sup>52</sup> Blumenson, 295. General Bernard Montgomery commanded the Eighth Army through December 1943 and then left for Britain to assume command of the 21st Army Group.

## Case Study One: First Battle of Cassino January 20 – February 12, 1944

The battle of Cassino was the most grueling, the most harrowing, and in one respect, perhaps the most tragic, of any phase of the war in Italy. When I think back on the weeks and finally months of searing struggle, the biting cold, the torrents of rain and snow, the lakes of mud that sucked down machines and men, and, most of all the deeply dug fortifications in which the Germans waited for us in the hills, it seems to me that no soldiers in history were given a more difficult assignment than the Fifth Army in that winter of 1944.

LTG Mark Clark, US Fifth Army Commander during the Battle of Cassino

The First Battle of Cassino's opening moves began two days after MG Ryder's 34th ID Red Bulls seized Monte Trocchio and first observed the Rapido River, Cassino town and the mouth of the Liri Valley resting under the domineering wall of Monte Cassino and the adjacent Abruzzi heights. Historian Fred Majdalany poetically described the illusion of mountain battlefields that transform from breathtaking beauty to harsh reality upon approach as "long vertical shadows deepen into great ravines; grey and fawn shadings harden into rocky ledges, slopes, and fierce jagged crests; and the mountains assume individual shapes within the tight mass."<sup>53</sup> The battle occurred January 12 to February 12, 1944, along the southern front of the Fifth Army's two-front plan to break the Gustav Line, destroy the German forces in central Italy, and capture Rome.

In adherence to General Alexander's "Battle for Rome" order, LTG Clark envisioned four phases for the Gustav Line operation. The French Expeditionary Corps (FEC) would conduct a shaping attack along the right flank, then the British X Corps would establish a bridgehead and capture the heights overlooking the south side of Liri Valley. With both flanks of the front secured, the US II Corps would execute the final shaping operation to establish a bridgehead across the Rapido River south of Highway 6, well out of reach of the Monte Cassino bastion. The combined actions would open the critical ground line of communication and suitable avenue of approach

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<sup>53</sup> Majdalany, 3.

necessary for the US 1st Armored Division (AD) to deliver the decisive exploitation into the Liri Valley. Clark's intent for the broad frontal attack was to draw in and pin down German reserves from the vicinity of Rome before the landings at Anzio, to break through the Gustav line and open Highway 6 to consolidate his force, and thereby trap the German Tenth Army from withdrawing to northern Italy.<sup>54</sup>



Figure 3. The US Fifth Army's Plan for Cassino and Anzio, January, 1944. *Rome – Arno 1944* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2003), 4, accessed March 9, 2017, <http://www.history.army.mil/brochures/romar/map1.JPG>.

<sup>54</sup> Rudolf Böhmler, *Monte Cassino: A German View* (London: Cassell and Company, 1964), 140-141, 148; Ellis, 50, 115; Homer R. Ankrum, *Dogfaces Who Smiled Through Tears* (Lake Mills, IA: Graphic Publishing, 1987), 389. On January 23, 1944, Hitler directed that the defense at Monte Cassino be raised to 'fortress strength' and must 'on no account be lost.'

It should be remembered that Generalfeldmarschall Kesselring considered the Gustav Line decisive to the defense of Italy and Rome, a fact reinforced by the Führer's simple order to "hold the line" regarding the January 1944 situation.<sup>55</sup> Along the Gustav Line, Kesselring considered Monte Cassino the crucial anchor and feared its fall would make the entire line "untenable and force the [German] Tenth Army to withdraw toward Rome."<sup>56</sup> Generalleutnant von Senger's XIV Panzer Corps defended the twenty-mile-wide front west Apennine range the with 5th Mountain Division, the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division, and the 44th and 94th Divisions.<sup>57</sup> Cognizant of the risk associated with an Allied amphibious assault along the Tyrrhenian coast that could encircle the German Tenth Army, von Senger positioned a fifth division, the 71st Division, near Anzio, while Kesselring retained the 29th and 90th Panzer Grenadier Divisions in reserve near Rome.<sup>58</sup>

The Fifth Army assault on the Gustav Line began as planned with General Alphonse Juin's FEC attacking before daybreak on January 12, 1944, towards Santo Elia and Atina to seize the defended heights north of Cassino, followed by a hook south into the Liri Valley well behind the German defenses.<sup>59</sup> The FEC's attack coincided with a German relief in place, which allowed the FEC to advance nearly four miles reaching the main Gustav Line defenses by January 15.<sup>60</sup> Despite Juin's initial success and request for an exploitation forces, Clark denied the request and adhered to his original plan.<sup>61</sup> Without reinforcements, the FEC was forced to pause to refit from exhaustion and exposure, but Juin had given von Senger reason for concern.

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<sup>55</sup> Parker, 77; Ellis, 115. On January 23, 1944, Hitler directed that the defense at Monte Cassino be raised to "fortress strength" and must "on no account be lost."

<sup>56</sup> Blumenson, 318.

<sup>57</sup> Ford, 26-27, 34.

<sup>58</sup> Ian Gooderson, *A Hard Way to Make War: The Allied Campaign in Italy in the Second World War* (London: Conway, 2008), 249; Blumenson, 318, 376.

<sup>59</sup> Parker, 70, 73-75, Ford, 32.

<sup>60</sup> Blumenson, 314, Ford, 33.

<sup>61</sup> Ford, 33, Parker, 77-78. Blumenson points out that Clark had designated the 45th ID as the Fifth Army reserve with the priority of commitment to the Gustav Line front initially, and then Anzio, 322.

On January 16-17, Lieutenant General Richard McCreery's British X Corps launched a series of successive attacks across the Garigliano River south of the Liri Valley. McCreery's three divisions were to seize the coastal road near Minturno, the area around Castelforte and Monte Castiello, and the heights near Santo Ambrogio to set conditions for II Corps attack into the Liri Valley.<sup>62</sup> The British faced the German 94th Panzer Grenadier Division, who had destroyed bridges, emplaced some 24,000 mines, and fortified the heights on the west bank of the swift, swollen river.<sup>63</sup> Supported by joint fires and amphibious vehicles, the British achieved sufficient success within the first twenty-four hours that Kesselring committed the 29th and 90th Panzer Grenadier Divisions from the Anzio-Rome area to prevent the collapse of the Garigliano sector.<sup>64</sup> Although arriving too late to prevent a durable British bridgehead at Minturno, the fresh German reserves denied the British 46th Division from securing their vital objective in the heights over the Rapido-Liri confluence.<sup>65</sup>

Despite the French and British efforts, the Gustav Line defenses were not sufficiently shaped to support II Corps' breakthrough. On January 20, LTG Clark met with MG Geoffrey Keyes, II Corps commander, and MG Fred Walker, 36th ID Commander, to apprise them of the situation and reinforce the role of the 36th ID's objective to Fifth Army's plan.<sup>66</sup> After their discussion, Clark recorded in his personal journal that "it is essential that I make that attack fully expecting heavy losses in order to hold all the troops on my front and draw more to it, thereby clearing the way for SHINGLE. The attack [on the 36th ID across the Rapido River] is on."<sup>67</sup> This

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<sup>62</sup> Parker, 85.

<sup>63</sup> Blumenson, 315-316; Ellis, 68; Parker, 87.

<sup>64</sup> Blumenson, 316, 318-320.

<sup>65</sup> Ford, 35-36; Blumenson, 320; Parker 100-101. Von Senger initially committed one regiment from the adjacent 15th Panzergrenadier Division in the Liri Valley.

<sup>66</sup> Blumenson, 320-321, 326-328. Blumenson provides a summary of the correspondence and discussions between Walker, Keyes, and Clark during the month before the 36th ID attack. The conditions and concerns had been tabled but little had been done to mitigate the known impediments to establishing the opening of the Liri valley, 326-328.

<sup>67</sup> Blumenson, 320-321.

single decision surrounded by controversy, particularly when the initial attack across the Rapido is viewed as a single discrete action, rather than as part of a broader operational approach.<sup>68</sup>

However, Clark's critical concerns extended well beyond the 36th ID's front; Operation Shingle, the amphibious assault on Anzio, had already begun with the US VI Corps' naval convoy already steaming north and strategic constraints dictated the Anzio landing take place on January 22.

With grave misgivings, Walker attacked at the Rapido River south of Cassino on the evening of January 20.<sup>69</sup> His plan was for two regiments to establish crossing points between Sant' Angelo and Cassino, with one regiment held back as an exploitation force to expand a tenable bridgehead.<sup>70</sup> The 36th ID's attack was preceded with air and artillery fires for nearly twenty-four hours, followed by a demonstration in the 34th ID's sector to divert the German's attention.<sup>71</sup> Despite these supporting efforts, the German 15th Panzer Grenadier Division's lower Rapido engagement areas diffused most of the energy of the 36th ID's attack before they reached the river.<sup>72</sup> By January 22, the enemy and nature forced the 36th ID's culmination, denying II Corps the bridgehead necessary for exploitation into the Liri Valley.<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, the 36th ID

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<sup>68</sup> Peter Caddick-Adams recorded that The Military Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives held hearings in March 1946 over the 36th ID's bloody Rapido battle, and concluded it was a "legitimate if difficult operation," 108. Blumenson provides a thorough summary of the correspondence and discussions between Walker, Keyes, and Clark during the month before the 36th ID attack, 326-328.

<sup>69</sup> Duane Schultz, "Rage Over the Rapido," *World War II* 25, no. 5 (January/February 2011): 9, accessed February 22, 2017, <http://duaneschultz.com/wp-content/uploads/Rage-over-the-Rapido.pdf>. As a battalion commander in WW I, Walker's unit of 1200 troops opposed a German attempt to cross the Marne with a force of 10,000, the results of which were devastating for the Germans.

<sup>70</sup> Caddick-Adams, 105-106; Blumenson, 322. The 36th ID bridgehead was planned to reach a depth of two miles.

<sup>71</sup> Ankrum, 388-389.

<sup>72</sup> Blumenson, 329-333. The 36th ID was denied the allocated twelve amphibious vehicles (DUKW) due to losses during VI Corps' Operation Shingle rehearsal. The division lost twenty-five percent of their boat and bridging equipment during the initial approach to the Rapido from enemy and elemental effects.

<sup>73</sup> Caddick-Adams, 106-108. In thirty-six hours, the 36th ID suffered "1681 losses – 143 killed, 663 wounded, and 875 missing, most of whom were known to be captured," Blumenson, 346.



succeeded in causing sufficient concern that German reserves were retained at the Gustav front, which allowed the VI Corps' to land at Anzio virtually unopposed on January 22.<sup>74</sup>

On January 23, Clark met with his three corps commanders along the Gustav Line to reinvigorate the breakthrough into the Liri Valley to consolidate the Fifth Army at Anzio. He ordered Keyes to renew his attack to open the Liri Valley, while Juin was to support the renewed offensive by swinging south towards Mount Belvedere to cover the II Corps' right flank.<sup>75</sup> Keyes in turn ordered the 34th ID to attack across the Rapido River to seize Cassino and the adjacent heights, while the degraded 36th ID would support with a feint south of Cassino. The purpose of II Corps' renewed attack remained unchanged, to establish a crossing site [north of Sant' Angelo] through which to pass the 1 Armored Division (AD) exploitation force.<sup>76</sup>

Since the beginning of the Fifth Army attack at the Gustav Line, the 34th ID had conducted extensive reconnaissance along their Rapido River front.<sup>77</sup> The patrolling confirmed that the Rapido River was fordable in the 34th ID's sector, a risk the German defenders had mitigated by clearing fields of fire, flooding the plain, and developing extensive engagement areas.<sup>78</sup> Illustrating the extensive preparations along the Gustav Line, the S3 of 3-133 Infantry observed that, "the Germans had staked out enough barbed wire on both sides of the Rapido River to fence in all the farms in Iowa and Illinois."<sup>79</sup> British historian John Ellis records that "all of the 34th axes of attack were hideously difficult" and faced a network of pillboxes and bunkers, "aprons of barbed wire" to depths of six feet, and minefields to depths of 400 yards lined the

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<sup>74</sup> Böhmler, 148.

<sup>75</sup> Blumenson, 366.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 366-367.

<sup>77</sup> Ankrum, 390-391.

<sup>78</sup> Ankrum, 397; Böhmler, 152; Majdalany, 79. These three Cassino veterans' narratives are indispensable for framing an understanding of the German defense the 34th ID's attacked at Cassino.

<sup>79</sup> Ankrum, 389.

river.<sup>80</sup> The heights beyond the mined and flooded morass offered no better terrain. Ryder recorded that, “these slopes, seamed with deep ravines, rose precipitously 450 meters in 1000 meters and were thoroughly organized with wires, mines, felled trees, concrete bunkers and steel-turreted machine gun emplacements.”<sup>81</sup>

Within MG Keyes’ guidance and his understanding of the battlefield developed through reconnaissance, MG Ryder developed an initial operational approach to punch a hole in the Gustav Line and open a line of communication with the VI Corps at Anzio.<sup>82</sup> Ryder’s operational plan was a two-regiment assault across the Rapido River with his remaining regiment held to reinforce success. The 135th Infantry was to cross north of Cassino and then turn south along the western bank into the village, while the 133rd Infantry was to cross further north near the Monte Villa Barracks to seize points along the foot of the Cassino massif and the road that ran south into the town.<sup>83</sup> Ryder then intended to use those gains to project the 168th Infantry through the bridgehead in a broad sweeping axis between the FEC and Cassino to seize the heights beyond the monastery and gain control of the Liri valley opening.<sup>84</sup> To aid in breaching the extensive minefields, Ryder attached elements of the 756th Tank Battalion to his regiments.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Ellis, 115.

<sup>81</sup> Ellis, 116. Majdalany recorded that the German portable pillboxes used in the Cassino area had five-inch thick armor and were designed for a machine-gun crew, 89.

<sup>82</sup> Blumenson, 366.

<sup>83</sup> Luttrell, 11; Blumenson, 368-369. Ryder considered the barracks key terrain for Cassino attack.

<sup>84</sup> Luttrell, 11; Caddick-Adams, 110; Ellis, 114; Majdalany, 81.

<sup>85</sup> Blumenson, 369. The 756th Tank Battalion attached to the 34th ID for this phase brought fifty-four medium (M4 Sherman) and seventeen light (M3 Stuart) tanks.

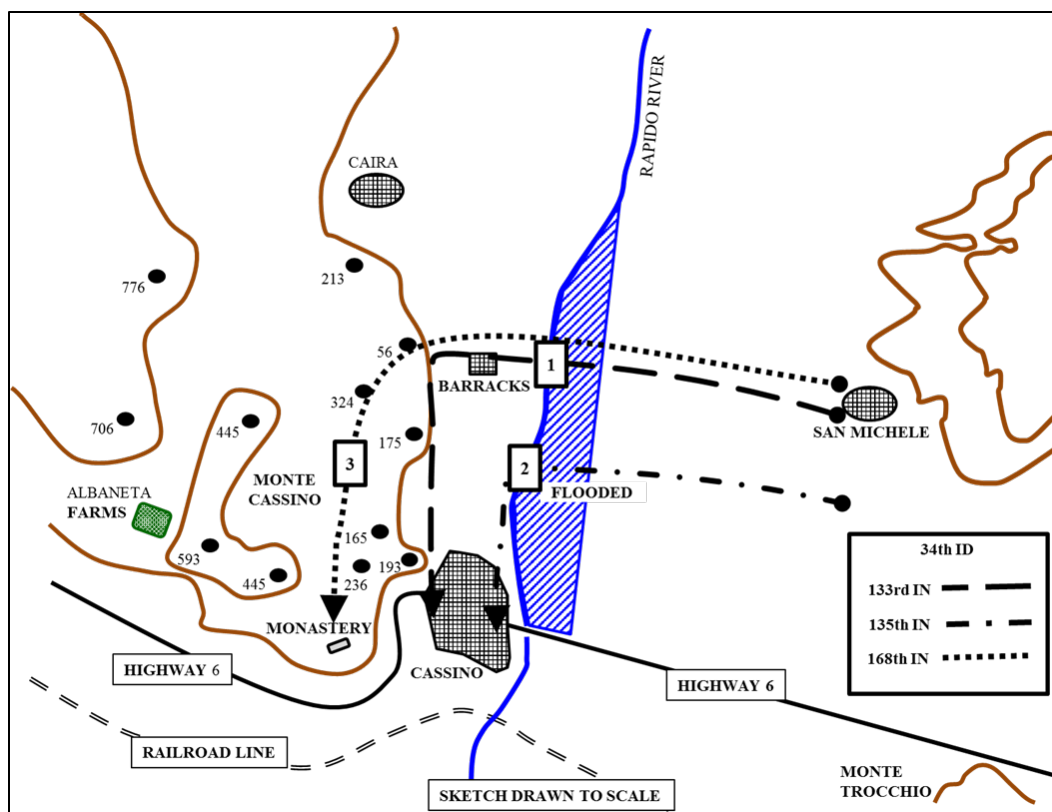


Figure 4. The 34th ID Initial Lines of Operation (January 24, 1944). Author compiled from the following sources: *Cassino: The Hollow Victory* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984), xii; *Dogfaces Who Smiled Through Tears* (Lake Mills, IA: Graphic Publishing, 1987), 437.

Although assigned a tertiary role in Fifth Army's and II Corps' initial plans, the 34th ID attacked the Cassino front in a primary role at 2200 on January 24 to secure the opening the Liri Valley, which would prove to be essential to Fifth Army's destruction of the German Tenth Army and capture of Rome. The opening artillery barrage coincided with the 133rd Infantry's attack to establish a bridgehead and seize the Monte Villa Barracks. Throughout January 25, the 133rd Infantry fought a series of advances and withdrawals through the mine-wire defensive belts, without the benefit of armor, and under the registered German guns, eventually securing a shallow bridgehead on the west side of the Rapido by midnight.<sup>86</sup> The same day, the FEC attacked south to capture Mount Belvedere, a task that took two days to accomplish.<sup>87</sup> On January 26, Ryder ordered

<sup>86</sup> Böhmler, 152.

<sup>87</sup> Blumenson, 372.

the 133rd Infantry to expand its bridgehead, while the 135th Infantry was to attack at points closer to Cassino and subsequently attack Hill 213 from the south.<sup>88</sup> The 133rd Infantry's 100th Battalion attack was repelled and the 135th Infantry managed to cross only one company to the far side of the Rapido during the night.<sup>89</sup>

During the minimal gains of January 26, Ryder shifted his focus beyond the Italian Barracks – Cassino area and ordered the 168th Infantry to pass through the 133rd Infantry to seize the heights beyond, from which the Germans had stalled the 34th ID's attack. Ryder shifted his operational approach because of his growing understanding of the situation. As US Army historian Martin Blumenson wrote that this shift in approach demonstrates an “increasing awareness of the situation: the need for better ground for river crossing operations; the strength of the German defenses in Cassino; the necessity for depriving the Germans the high ground; the urgency of reaching the Liri Valley; and the course of developments taking place still farther north in the French sector.”<sup>90</sup> Ryder realized his intermediate objective, a durable bridgehead, was only possible if the 168th Regiment gained control of Hills 56 and 213 before the energy of the 133rd and 135th Infantry Regiments was exhausted along the river. If successful, he could consolidate his gains; if the attempt failed, he would fail his mission and could have an entire regiment isolated on the far bank.

With this in mind, Ryder organized the 168th Infantry into a regimental combat team (RCT) to cross at two points, at the 133rd Infantry crossing and a point 1000 yards further north

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<sup>88</sup> Blumenson, 370.

<sup>89</sup> Böhmler, 152. The 100th Battalion was a Hawaiian National Guard unit comprised of Japanese-Americans, sent to Italy because the faulty assumption of the day was that they could not be trusted to fight in the Pacific Theater. They proved their patriotism and tenacity throughout the Italian Campaign and continue to be honored alongside other Red Bulls in the “34th Infantry Division Association Newsletter” Final Roll Call section.

<sup>90</sup> Blumenson, 370.

towards Cairra, and then to seize and hold Hills 56 and 213 and prepare for follow-on objectives.<sup>91</sup> Captain James Luttrell, a cannon company commander in the 168th RCT attack, recounted the specificity of Ryder's attack, which dictated a two-battalion front with a platoon of tanks per battalion attacking in front of the infantry to destroy pillboxes and clear paths through the anti-personnel mines and wire.<sup>92</sup> The *34th ID Lessons Learned in Combat*, compiled in September 1944, dedicates a chapter to the infantry-tank-tank destroyer team necessity in Italy, foreshadowing contemporary relevance. Lieutenant Colonel John L. Powers, commander of 2-168th RCT during this attack, stated that the tanks of the 756th Tank Battalion provided a passageway through the anti-personnel mines, breached the high barbed wire, and deterred German machine gunners from firing from fortifications for fear of drawing a tank fire. The infantry reciprocated the support by securing engineer construction of ramps along the Rapido bank and protecting tanks by destroying antitank and self-propelled anti-tank guns.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> A Regimental Combat Team (RCT) was formed by augmenting an infantry regiment with other units, such as armor, engineers, artillery, and cavalry. It was usually task organized for a limited duration to accomplish a specific mission as seen in the first battle of Cassino.

<sup>92</sup> James A. Luttrell, "The Operations of the 168th Infantry (34th ID) in the Rapido River Crossing, 28 January – 10 February, 1944." Personal Experience Paper, (Fort Benning, GA: US Army Infantry School, 1949), 13-14.

<sup>93</sup> 34th ID, *Lessons Learned in Combat*, Chapter III – Infantry-Tank-Tank Destroyer Team.

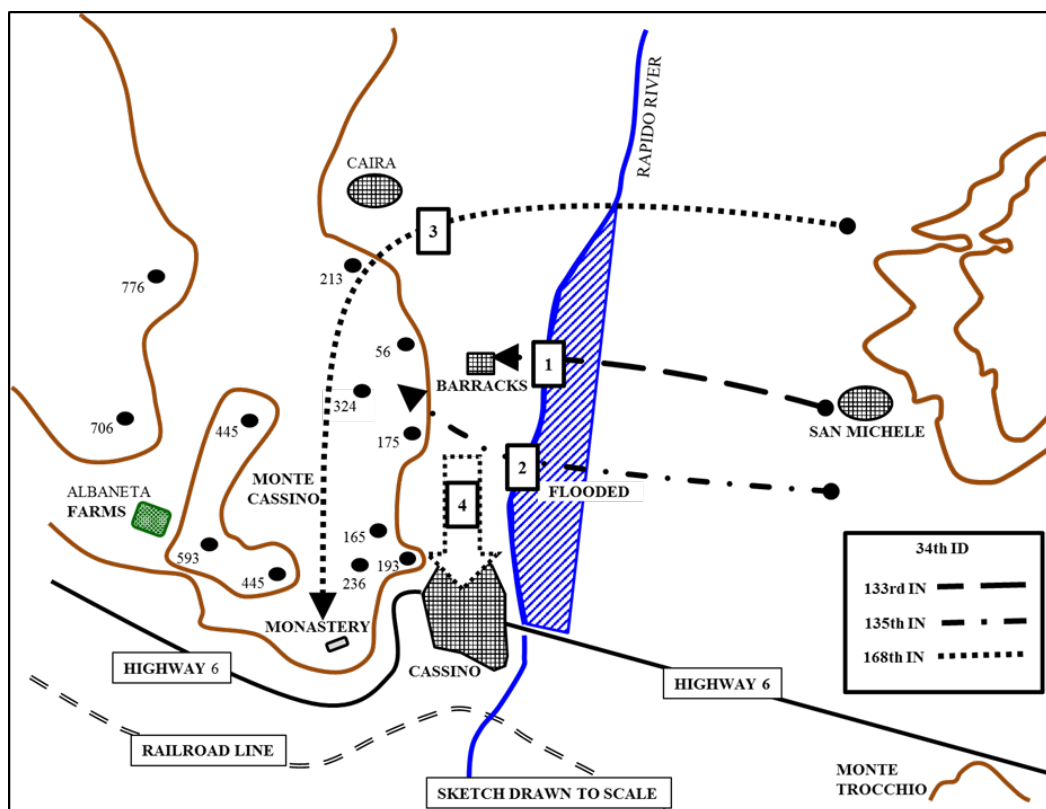


Figure 5. The 34th ID Lines of Operation (January 26, 1944). Author compiled from the following sources: *Cassino: The Hollow Victory* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984), xii; *Dogfaces Who Smiled Through Tears* (Lake Mills, IA: Graphic Publishing, 1987), 437.

At 6:30 a.m. on January 27, the 168th RCT attack opened with nine battalions of light and medium artillery concentrated on Hills 56 and 213.<sup>94</sup> Two regiments with attached tank platoons crossed the line of departure at 7:30 a.m., but the tanks quickly became bogged down in the marshy ground, requiring the strenuous efforts by the division's engineers to emplace suitable corduroy roads. Nevertheless, several infantry companies from the 168th RCT managed to reach Hill 213 by nightfall but fear of overextended lines caused a withdrawal back to the Rapido.<sup>95</sup> While the 168th RCT reconnoitered a better approach for their attached tanks, Ryder sought ways to increase the tempo of the attack. He augmented the 168th RCT with the 235th Engineer

<sup>94</sup> Luttrell, 14. Captain Luttrell's eight-gun Cannon Company, 168th RGT fired approximately 1200 rounds in this hour of preparatory fire.

<sup>95</sup> Luttrell, 15-16; Blumenson, 371.

Battalion and 1108th Engineer Group, the 760th Tank Battalion, and the 175th Artillery Battalion to organize a force for the task of seizing Hills 56 and 213.<sup>96</sup>

Although, the FEC held Mount Belvedere at this time, it was a precarious position considering its southern neighbor, Monte Castellone was not yet in the 34th ID's control. MG Keyes recognized the risk that the seam presented, but also realized the potential to "unhinge the Rapido defenses" with a deeper sweeping attack behind Monte Cassino in coordination with the FEC.<sup>97</sup> To accomplish this, Keyes attached the 36th ID's 142nd Infantry to the 34th ID to form an additional RCT to be led by Brigadier General Frederic Butler, the 34th Assistant Division Commander.<sup>98</sup>

Early on January 29, the 168th RCT renewed their attack and made steady progress across the mile and a half approach to their objectives. That afternoon, Ryder committed the 756th Tank Battalion to the assault through a newly discovered approach to the north that allowed twenty-three tanks to assemble northeast of Hill 213 and capture the town of Cairra.<sup>99</sup> This enabled the 168th RCT to seize Hill 56 and 213 by nightfall and hold their objectives despite three strong German counterattacks over the next two days. During the 168 RCT's attack, the 133rd and 135th Infantry were unable to make any significant gains in their sectors along the Rapido.

With a clearer understanding of the situation and augmented with additional forces, Ryder modified his operational approach again on January 30. He envisioned a two-pronged sweeping attack against the across the Cassino massif to secure the heights from the German 44th Division and ultimately open the Liri Valley. For the outer prong, the 135th Infantry would conduct a forward passage of lines with the 168th Regiment at Hill 213 and attack towards Monte Castellone

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<sup>96</sup> Blumenson, 372-373. Hill 56 and 213 were necessary for a subsequent attack on Monte Castellone and to facilitate the 133rd Infantry's seizure of the Monte Villa Barracks.

<sup>97</sup> Blumenson, 372.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Luttrell, 18; Caddick-Adams, 113.

and Colle Maiola, while the 142nd RCT would attack Mass Manna to secure the vulnerable seam between the 34th ID and FEC.<sup>100</sup> Attacking along the inner prong nearest to Cassino, the 168th Infantry would seize Hill 593, also known as Monte Calvary, which Böhmler called the “tactical center of the Cairo Massif.”<sup>101</sup> Along the Rapido line, the 133rd Infantry received the 760th Tank Battalion to form an RCT seize the Monte Villa Barracks and then turn south to capture Cassino and Route 6.

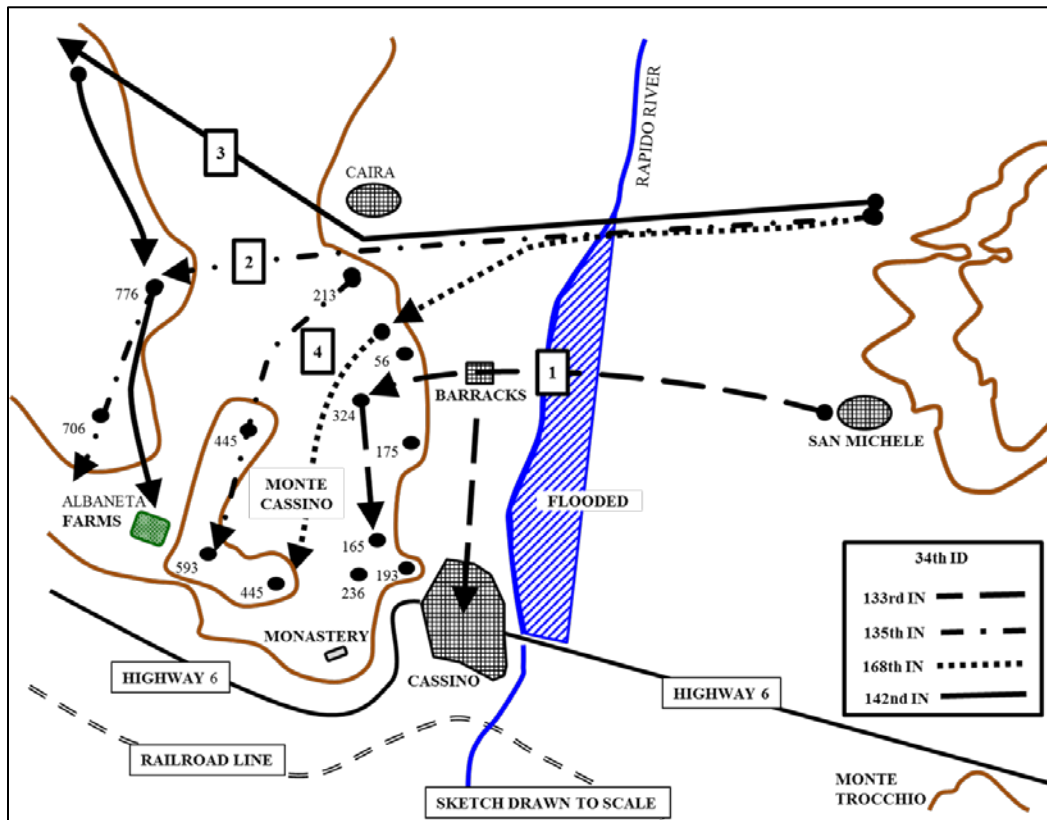


Figure 6. The 34th ID Lines of Operation (February 1, 1944). Author compiled from the following sources: *Cassino: The Hollow Victory* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984), xii; *Dogfaces Who Smiled Through Tears* (Lake Mills, IA: Graphic Publishing, 1987), 437.

On February 1, Ryder’s Red Bulls again attacked the Gustav Line. Dense fog obscured their movements in the mountains, enabling the 135th Infantry to reach their objectives on Monte

<sup>100</sup> Ellis, 124; Blumenenson, 377.

<sup>101</sup> Böhmler, 153; Parker, 133. Parker further explains that atop Hill 593 sat a ruined fort that blocks the approach to the monastery, providing the defenders excellent observation and fields of fire in all directions.



Castellone and Colle Maiola by 10:00 a.m.<sup>102</sup> Over the next five days, the 34th ID made significant gains along Ryder's envisioned lines of operation. Along the Rapido line and with the 135th Infantry protecting their right flank, the 133rd RCT captured the Monte Villa Barracks, Hill 175, Hill 193, and gained a secure foothold in northeast Cassino against the 211th Grenadier Regiment.<sup>103</sup> The 142nd RCT assumed the defense of Monte Castellone, which protected the right flank and rear of the 135th Infantry's attack along their axes of attack oriented on Colle Sant'Angelo and Hill 593.<sup>104</sup> By February 6, the cooperation between the 135th and 168th Regiments nearly pierced the Liri Valley and held the "key to Cassino", capturing Hill 445, Hill 593, Hill 706, and briefly Colle Sant'Angelo; accomplished through fierce fighting from both sides, in equally bitter conditions.<sup>105</sup>

The German reaction to the 34th ID's February offensive indicates its effectiveness, as forces were drawn from other critical fronts and committed just in time to prevent an Allied breakthrough. In the heights, the 90th Panzer Grenadier Division rushed to counterattack through the 44th Division's crumbling defense at Hill 593, while the Schulz Battle Group arrived from the Anzio front to reinforce the foothills above Cassino, as well as the line between Hill 593 and Monte Castellone.<sup>106</sup> Böhmler recorded that during this period of the battle, the German defense "hung almost literally by its eyebrows" on the slopes overlooking Highway 6 and "a determined onslaught on it might well have sent the defenders hurtling down into the valley below."<sup>107</sup> Alas, the 34th ID had "reached the limits of human endurance" and the Germans' ability to reinforce

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<sup>102</sup> Parker, 132-133; Gooderson, *Cassino*, 70; Ankrum, 406.

<sup>103</sup> Ankrum, 389, 399-406. The combined arms team was essential to this portion of the battle. The tanks destroyed the pillboxes and created paths through the mined-wire obstacles, while the infantry filled in antitank ditches and destroyed antitank guns near and in the rubble of Cassino. The 133rd Infantry captured over 200 prisoners from the 211th Grenadier Regiment, 71st ID during the two-mile advance from the barracks to Cassino.

<sup>104</sup> Parker, 120.

<sup>105</sup> Böhmler, 153-154.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 154-155. The Schulz Battle group was built around the 1st Parachute Regiment.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

their defense exceeded II Corps and Fifth Army's ability to turn Ryder's hard tactical gains into operational success.<sup>108</sup>

On February 12, Ryder's final offensive culminated and he ordered his exhausted force to dig in. The Red Bulls were relieved six days later by the British Eighth Army's New Zealand Corps to transition to consolidation and reorganization activities. His intended purpose of securing the mouth of the Liri Valley for II Corps' exploitation and Fifth Army's consolidation at Anzio remained unchanged, while his flexible operational approach did. He demonstrated operational art by modifying his approach and task organization, controlling tempo to maintain organizational endurance amidst severe attrition, and extending his operational reach in a challenging operational environment. In the end, the Allies launched three more major offensives, amassed five times the force strength, and expended enormous resources before breaking the Gustav Line, which Ryder had come so close to accomplishing in three weeks.<sup>109</sup> Although catastrophic success was not realized, Ryder's arrangement of tactical actions to achieve operational objectives of the broader Italian Campaign strategy offer some critical lessons.

## Analysis

MG Ryder practiced operational art during the First Battle of Cassino consistent with the current US Army doctrinal definition. This analysis will examine several elements of operational art to illustrate how he orchestrated the 34th ID's tactical actions in time, space, and purpose to accomplish operational goals within the Italian Campaign's strategic aims. MG Ryder demonstrated operational art through modifications to his operational approach, by extending his operational reach, and maintaining organizational endurance.

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<sup>108</sup> Mansoor, 119.

<sup>109</sup> Böhmler, 161. In the Battles of Cassino, the Allies suffered 55,000 casualties and the Germans suffered 20,000 casualties. During the second battle alone, the Allies leveled the Monte Cassino Monastery and Cassino town under 1250 tons of bombs and 600,000 artillery rounds.

First, Ryder demonstrated operational art in his flexible operational approach during the first battle of Cassino. Although his end state remained anchored within the grander Fifth Army plan, he understood when the situation necessitated deviation from the original plan, and how to implement such changes during operations already in progress. Ryder shifted his lines of operation on three occasions based on his increasing understanding of the enemy, key terrain, and environmental factors.<sup>110</sup> Perhaps the best example happened on January 26, when Ryder realized that his two-pronged assault at the Rapido had faltered due to unsuitable terrain and the strength of the German defenses at the Monte Villa Barracks and Hill 213. He modified his initial approach and committed the 168th Infantry further north to conduct a broader sweep across the Rapido plain and the Cassino massif toward the abbey. Ultimately, he would follow this success with the 135th and 142nd Infantry's even deeper sweep on the massif, and the cumulative gains of four regiments who obliquely attacked the Gustav Line put the Liri Valley in the Allied grasp.

Closely associated with Ryder's lines of operation was how he organized his force capabilities, for specific periods and objectives, to bend battlefield conditions to his will. The most important of these task organizations was the combined arms teams of infantry-tank-artillery-engineer units throughout the battle. These organizational changes were essential to achieving a unity of effort and the sufficient concentration required to overcome the German engagement areas on the Rapido plain, which were demonstrated by the 168th Infantry at Caira and Hill 213 and the 133rd Infantry at the Monte Villa Barracks and Cassino town. Once, the arrangement of forces also incorporated a task force commander, as seen in the formation of the 142nd RCT (from the 36th ID) under Brigadier General Butler, which mitigated friction from incorporating an outside organization into the 34th ID's operational plan in stride.

Secondly, Ryder also demonstrated operational art by extending and maintaining his operational reach in a technologically restrictive environment through unconventional sustainment.

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<sup>110</sup> ADRP 3-0, 2-5. "A line of operations is a line that defines the directional orientation of a force in time and space in relation to the enemy and links the force with its base of operations and objectives."

Fundamental to operational reach are the elements of basing, culmination, and arguably end state.<sup>111</sup> While the joint base for Fifth Army during Cassino and Anzio operations centered around Naples' modern transportation hub, the 34th ID based their actions from the less developed Monte Trocchio area, which was the focal point for sustainment throughput. Ryder's logisticians overcame the terrain and environment by innovating methods of supply and medical evacuation, which extended organizational endurance and operational reach. Former US Army officer, Professor Peter Mansoor recorded for the 34th ID to, "sustain itself in the mountains, the division used eleven hundred mules and seven hundred litter bearers over and above the normal allotment of transportation and medical personnel."<sup>112</sup> War journalist Ernie Pyle observed that one mule-pack outfit could sustain a battalion during intense mountain fighting, but that raw human effort formed a critical leg of the supply chain.<sup>113</sup> Although Ryder's force failed to achieve his end state, the 34th ID's sustainment during this battle undeniably prevented an earlier culmination.<sup>114</sup>

Lastly, MG Ryder demonstrated operational art by maintaining the 34th ID's organizational endurance in a harsh operational environment through the tempo of his assaults. US Army doctrine defines tempo as "the relative speed and rhythm of military operations over time with respect to the enemy."<sup>115</sup> Over the course of the three-week battle, Ryder orchestrated three significant offensive thrusts, or what Böhmler called "hammer-blows," into the Gustav Line to

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<sup>111</sup> ADRP 3-0, 2-6 to 2-7, 2-9. End state is included in this list because it "promotes unity of effort; facilitates integration, synchronization, and disciplined initiative," which is applicable to the entire organization.

<sup>112</sup> Peter R. Mansoor, *The GI Offensive in Europe: The Triumph of American Infantry Divisions, 1941-1945* (Lawrence, KS: University Press Kansas, 1999), 119.

<sup>113</sup> Ernie Pyle, *Brave Men*, Introduction by G. Kurt Piehler, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2001) 153-158. Pyle recorded that an average night's resupply for a battalion fighting in the jagged heights moved "85 cans of water, 100 cases of K rations, 10 cases of D rations, 10 miles of telephone wire, 25 cases of grenades and rifle and machine-gun ammunition, about 100 rounds of heavy mortar shells, 1 radio, 2 telephones, and 4 cases of first-aid packets and sulfa drugs."

<sup>114</sup> Majdalany wrote, "The performance of the 34th Division at Cassino must rank with the finest feats of arms carried out by any soldiers during the war." The achievements of the fighting force would have been impossible without the maintenance of extended lines of sustainment, 87.

<sup>115</sup> ADRP 3-0, 2-7.

break the German defenses and endurance. The importance of the rhythm over time becomes apparent when one considers that attacks elsewhere on the Gustav Line lasted no more than ninety-six hours, and those were against more favorable force ratios than what Ryder faced. He balanced the tension between breaking his division and breaking the Gustav Line defenses, overcoming terrain, weather, and superior numbers, while fighting against time to open the Liri Valley corridor to Anzio.

There are a few points to consider regarding the relevance of MG Ryder's demonstration of operational art for contemporary and future conflict. The first is the flexibility to assume changing roles within an operational framework, in a time and resource constrained environment. According to MG Keyes' plan for the first battle of Cassino, the 34th ID played a tertiary supporting role, but after the 36th ID's attack on the lower Rapido culminated, Ryder quickly assumed the critical task of breaking into the Gustav Line. The second point of relevance for future conflict is the harsh reality of mountain warfare and the innovation necessary to overcome these realities. The parallels with operations during the Korean War, in northern Iraq, and eastern Afghanistan are obvious. Technological advances in manned and unmanned aircraft, satellite communication, weaponry, and personal protective equipment offer much to solving the tactical dilemmas of movement and maneuver, fires, sustainment, and protection, but they do not eliminate these problems. Finally, the first battle of Cassino provides a timeless lesson about the decisive role the human dimension contributes to conflict through cognitive ability, physical stamina, and will.<sup>116</sup> MG Ryder and the 34th ID's accomplishments at Cassino astounded follow on forces, and their success is a testament to the power of human intellect, collective will, and raw physical effort.

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<sup>116</sup> *US Army Human Dimension Strategy* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combined Arms Center, 2015), accessed April 8, 2017, [http://usacac.army.mil/sites/default/files/publications/20150524\\_Human\\_Dimension\\_Strategy\\_vr\\_Signature\\_WM\\_1.pdf](http://usacac.army.mil/sites/default/files/publications/20150524_Human_Dimension_Strategy_vr_Signature_WM_1.pdf), 1.

## Case Study Two: The Anzio Breakout January 20 – February 12, 1944

Instead of hurling a wild cat onto the shore all we got was a stranded whale and Sulva Bay over again.

Winston Churchill, PM Great Britain

This whole affair had a strong odor of Gallipoli and apparently the same amateur was still on the coach's bench.

MG John P. Lucas, VI Corps commander during Anzio invasion

Prime Minister Churchill conceived the Anzio invasion (Operation Shingle) in November 1943, and after he had gained US political and military concurrence, he discussed the potential with 15th Army Group Commander General Sir Harold Alexander.<sup>117</sup> Churchill believed that an Anzio invasion offered the best opportunity to eliminate the German Tenth Army and capture Rome. With Operation Overlord preparations in full swing, he convinced the Combined Chiefs of Staff to delay the transfer of amphibious shipping from the Mediterranean until late January, which guaranteed a two division landing but imposed a strict planning and operational timeline.<sup>118</sup>

Ultimately, the responsibility for planning and executing Operation Shingle fell on LTG Clark and his US Fifth Army staff, and he has received the brunt of criticism for failing to break the Gustav Line, cut off the German Tenth Army, and capture Rome expeditiously. However, this conclusion fails to consider the ambiguous guidance he received from US political and military superiors, General Alexander's responsibility in orchestrating "The battle for Rome," and the sheer scope of the Fifth Army's two front operation.<sup>119</sup> Additionally, as the battle through the Bernhardt

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<sup>117</sup> Jon B. Mikolashek, *General Mark Clark: Commander of the Fifth Army and Liberator of Rome* (Philadelphia: Casemate Publishers, 2013), 80; Blumenson, 303.

<sup>118</sup> Blumenson, 297.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 185, 353. As early as September 1943, Rome had become an Allied strategic objective of sorts. Although General Marshall was an outspoken critic of the Italian Campaign, once it was initiated, he "agreed Rome ought to be seized as quickly as possible." General Alexander's Battle for Rome order issued January 12, 1944 stated the Anzio invasion was "to cut the enemy's main communications in the Colli Laziali [Alban Hills] area Southeast of Rome, and to threaten the [German] rear." The British Eighth Army was holding at the Gustav Line on the Adriatic front during this time.

Line had affirmed, the only way for the Allies to avoid a frontal attack into German defensive lines was by an amphibious flanking movement.

On January 12, Clark's direction to MG John P. Lucas, US VI Corps Commander was to: "1. Seize and secure a beachhead in the vicinity of Anzio; 2. Advance on Colli Laziali [Alban Hills]." <sup>120</sup> However, General Alexander was unusually directive in ordering the Clark to seize the Alban Hills to cut off the German Tenth Army's line of communication, and hence their line of retreat. This tension between the Army Group and Army level clouded a clear understanding of strategic and operational goals, a problem that would carry through the initial invasion to the breakout to Rome.

On January 22, 1944, the amphibious invasion at Anzio commenced and rapidly achieved their intermediate objectives due to Allied deception efforts and the attacks on the Gustav Line that had drawn in and held the 29th and 90th Panzer Grenadier Divisions. <sup>121</sup> Within twenty-four hours, Lucas had ninety percent of his force and equipment ashore with the British 1st ID in the north, the US Rangers in the center at Anzio, the 509th Parachute Infantry Regiment at Nettuno, and the US 3rd ID in the south. By January 25, the beachhead was expanded to a depth of twelve miles but short of the Alban Hills as Alexander had envisioned. Lucas was concerned that further advances would overextend his force, so he halted the attack to consolidate and reorganize his beachhead with supplies and two more divisions, the 45th ID and Combat Command A, 1st AD. <sup>122</sup>

The Anzio landing solicited an immediate German response, both strategically and operationally; within days Hitler sent units from Yugoslavia, France, and Germany, and within the first week, Feldmarschall Kesselring's thirteen divisions from northern Italy and the Adriatic front

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<sup>120</sup> Mikolashek, 81-83. Clark had changed the task for Colli Laziali from "secure" to the vague "advance on," and rescinded the order to "be prepared to advance on Rome" from his order on December 27, 1943.

<sup>121</sup> Blumenson, 360.

<sup>122</sup> The 45th ID was the Fifth Army Reserve for the opening offensive at the Cassino front, but were ashore at Anzio when their commitment in support of the 34th ID attack could have penetrated the Gustav Line.

began consolidating around the Allied beachhead under General Mackensen's Fourteenth Army command.<sup>123</sup> On January 30, Lucas attacked towards the Alban Hills as Clark's Rapido forces to the south prepared for another assault against the Gustav Line. The arriving German forces stopped VI Corps' attempt to reaching the Alban Hills, followed by a series of counterattacks throughout February to eliminate the beachhead.<sup>124</sup> On February 23, MG Lucian Truscott, formerly the 3rd ID Commander, replaced Lucas as VI Corps commander. By March 4, neither side had achieved their objectives, and the exhausted adversaries paused in a defensive stalemate.

While VI Corps fought desperately to prevent the beachhead's collapse, Ryder began his retrograde from the Cassino front to prepare for future commitment at Anzio. Alexander had realized by the end of January that he must shift the weight of the Eighth Army to the Cassino front to free up Fifth Army forces needed at Anzio if he had any chance of breaking the Gustav Line, saving the beachhead, eliminating Generaloberst Vietinghoff's Tenth Army, and capturing Rome. After the exhausted 34th ID had been relieved from the Cassino front, the division was loaded into trucks at San Michele for a thirty-five-mile movement to Saint Angelo de Alife to receive long overdue medical attention and sustenance.<sup>125</sup> The Red Bulls would eventually complete their retrograde to the Benevento area east of Naples.

Once the 34th ID had completed their retrograde, Ryder transitioned to rebuilding his division for future combat operations. He utilized the brief month respite from active combat with replacement operations, individual weapon and survivability training, and combined arms live fire

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<sup>123</sup> Allied Coalition Staff, 7; Ankrum, 446. By mid-January 1944, Kesselring was aware of an imminent Allied landing due to the build-up of ships and units at Naples but there were several plausible points of entry. After the initial landings his assumptions were validated.

<sup>124</sup> The Germans launched four counterattacks in February, while on the Cassino front, the 34th ID's push across Monte Cassino culminated on February 12 and the Second Battle of Cassino began on February 15 with the controversial bombing of the Monte Cassino Monastery. It culminated on February 18.

<sup>125</sup> Ankrum, 435-436. One of the key tasks during this period of the refit phase was rectifying the loss of accountability that occurred during the three-week battle. Ryder had pushed soldiers from every occupation forward to replace his dwindling lines. Additionally, during the offensive the replacements arrived under fire to dispersed units.



exercises.<sup>126</sup> Homer Ankrum, a Red Bull non-commissioned officer who received a battlefield commission in the Italian Campaign, recorded how essential the teamwork between seasoned Italian veterans and replacements were to the success of integration, reorganization, and training proficiency at all levels.<sup>127</sup>

By mid-March 1944, the 34th ID transitioned from refit operations to movement, and from March 18-25 the division loaded transport ships at the Port of Bagnoli, just west of Naples, for their movement to the Anzio beachhead.<sup>128</sup> Ryder had participated in LTG Clark's mid-November 1943 meeting about the importance of Anzio to Allied designs in Italy, and now that possibility was about to become a reality.<sup>129</sup> Upon debarkation at the Anzio beachhead, the 34th ID immediately moved to the front to relieve the 3rd ID for an overdue refit.<sup>130</sup>

By April 1944, VI Corps held the 90,000 troop beachhead with the British 5th and 1st IDs, the US 45th and 34th IDs, and the 36th Engineer Regiment, while the 3rd ID, 1st AD, and 1st Special Services Force (SSF) formed the reserve and a substantial sustainment force operated in the Anzio-Nettuno area.<sup>131</sup> During the same time, General Mackensen's Fourteenth Army surrounded the beachhead with the three divisions under the I Parachute Corps and two divisions under the LXXVI Panzer Corps, for a total of 70,400 troops.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Ankrum, 439-443. The 2-133rd Infantry, which had served as the ceremonial unit for the Mediterranean Command in Algiers, returned to the 34th ID on March 9, 1944.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 442-443.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 443.

<sup>129</sup> L.K. Truscott, *Command Missions: A Personal Story* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1954), 286.

<sup>130</sup> Fisher, 110; Ankrum, 451.

<sup>131</sup> Fisher, 111.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

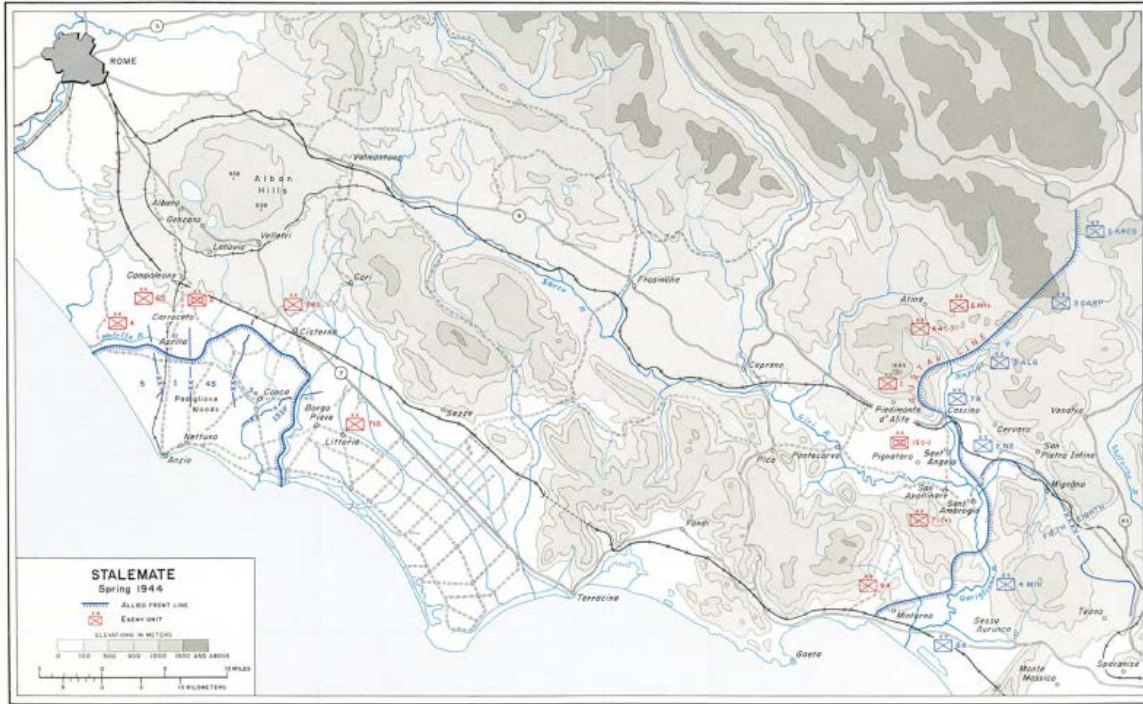


Figure 7. Cassino – Anzio Stalemate, Spring 1944. *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations: Salerno to Cassino* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1993), 497.

The 34th ID held the five-mile-wide Cisterna front from the Fosso de Carano on the left to the Nettuno-Cisterna Road on the right.<sup>133</sup> MG Ryder ordered the 168th and 135th Infantry to assume the left and right front line positions, respectively, and the 3-133rd Infantry to develop a defense in depth to their immediate rear, while the remainder of the 133rd Infantry constituted the division reserve.<sup>134</sup> During April and early May 1944, Ryder developed his defensive line and conducted aggressive patrolling, both in anticipation of a spring breakout offensive. Engineer-infantry teams emplaced mine-wire defensive belts and marked lanes in the haphazardly emplaced minefields that were emplaced by both sides in the February fighting.<sup>135</sup> On April 11, Ryder rotated the untested 2-133rd Infantry to the front to gain experience, and on April 20, he conducted a successful pre-breakout offensive on their left flank with the 3-168th Infantry Team that

<sup>133</sup> GMDS, 91.

<sup>134</sup> Ankrum, 451-453.

<sup>135</sup> *34th ID Lessons Learned in Combat*, “Chapter IV – Engineer Operations,” Major Carl J. Schieferstein, Executive Office, 109th Engineer Battalion, Miscellaneous, a.

straightened the division's defensive line and gained favorable positions.<sup>136</sup> Ryder demanded aggressive patrolling along his front to conduct reconnaissance and ambushes, with an emphasis on capturing German prisoners to develop a better understanding of the enemy disposition.<sup>137</sup>

In early May 1944, General Alexander outlined the final plan for the Allied spring offensive to break the two front stalemate in Italy (Operation Diadem).<sup>138</sup> The main blow would strike the Gustav Line, to be delivered by the British Eighth Army and the Fifth Army.<sup>139</sup> Once the Gustav Line collapsed, the next blow would be the breakout from Anzio towards Valmontone along Highway 6 to cut off and destroy the German Tenth Army. The entire force would pursue the German Fourteenth Army north of Rome to seize key airfields and cities, after destroying the German Tenth Army between the two Allied Armies.

However, Clark's designs again differed from "Alexander's strategic concept," and he directed Truscott to develop an attack plan for Rome, in addition to the base plan developed within Alexander's intent.<sup>140</sup> Truscott's plan (Operation Buffalo) would be a penetration of the LXXVI Panzer Corps defenses along the Cori-Valmontone axis, executed by a breakout force of 1st AD, 3rd ID, and 1st SSF. During Phase I, the breakout force would isolate and reduce Cisterna to establish a firm base on the X-Y Phase Line, and during Phase II the forces would occupy the O-B Phase Line to capture Cori and advance to cut Highway 6 at Valmontone.<sup>141</sup> In addition to the

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<sup>136</sup> Ankrum, 458-459.

<sup>137</sup> *34th ID Lessons Learned in Combat*, "Chapter VII – Intelligence," i.e. Order of Battle. The analysis of German intelligence reports indicated their reconnaissance patrolling was active and accurate as well, Allied Coalition Staff, 90-91.

<sup>138</sup> Mikolashek, 120-121.

<sup>139</sup> Fisher, 27-28. For Operation Diadem, the Allied force totaled four corps, with the Polish 2 Corps and the British XIII Corps under the Eighth Army, and the FEC and the US II Corps under the Fifth Army.

<sup>140</sup> Fisher, 119.

<sup>141</sup> Truscott, 372; Fisher, 122, 142. The X-Y Line was the first phase line and was tied into ridge a quarter of a mile beyond the railroad line. The O-B Line was the second phase line located about four miles northwest of Cisterna between Velletri and Cori.

main attack, the British 1st and 5th IDs would conduct diversionary attacks to the northwest, and the 45th and 34th ID would protect the left flank and control gaps in the rear area, respectively.

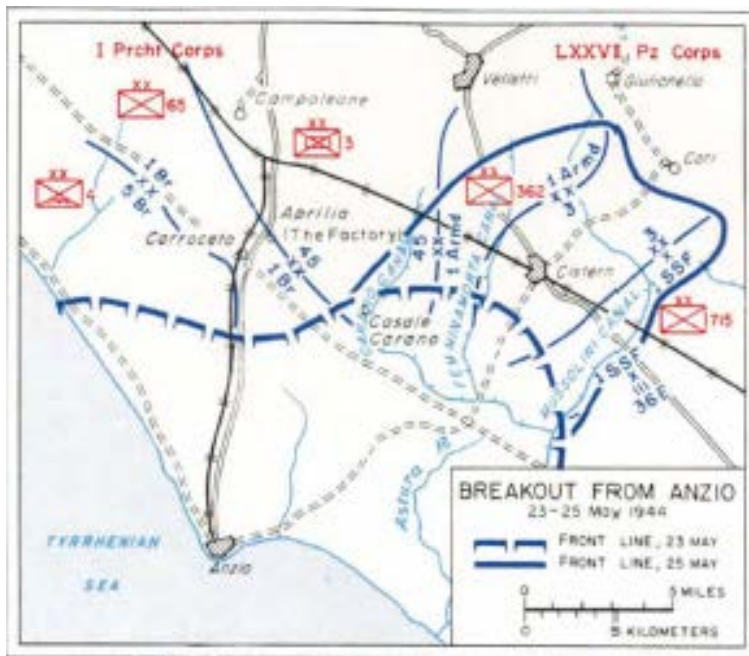


Figure 8. Anzio Breakout (Operation Buffalo), May 1944. *The Mediterranean Theater of Operations: Cassino to Alps* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1993), 589.

Before and during the breakout, MG Ryder had several shaping and supporting tasks that would require him to be flexible. The 34th ID was to screen the VI Corps' final preparations and clear lanes in the Allied mine-wire defensive belts for the breakout force's forward passage of lines. For the attack, Ryder provided two battalions from the 135th Infantry to support CCA 1st AD's attack. Once the attack passed through the 34th ID line, Ryder would reform and prepare to relieve the 1st AD or 1st SSF.<sup>142</sup> On May 20, the 1-133rd Infantry launched an attack across Mussolini Canal to gain needed maneuver room for the 1st SSF's attack, which resulted in terrain seized, forty-six German prisoners captured, and a battalion-sized armor-infantry team repelled.<sup>143</sup>

On May 11, Operation Diadem opened sixty miles to the south of Anzio and penetrated as far as the Hitler Line by May 19; meanwhile, VI Corps finalized attack preparations and

<sup>142</sup> Fisher, 114.

<sup>143</sup> Ankrum, 488-489.

maintained deception activities. After some debate between Clark and Alexander over when to initiate Operation Buffalo to coincide with operations at the Gustav Line, Alexander finally acquiesced and ordered the Anzio breakout to commence at 6:30 a.m. on May 23.<sup>144</sup> Throughout the night of May 22, the final movements of the assault forces moved to the line of departure while the 34th and 109th Engineer Battalions conducted the “tedious and hazardous work of clearing gaps through the Allied minefields.”<sup>145</sup> At 6:00 a.m. on May 23, the preparatory fires commenced with a simultaneous firing of some 1500 artillery pieces at the previously identified minefields and positions. At 6:30 a.m., additional blasts along the front joined the cacophony, as mine-wire breaching ‘Snakes’ widened the 400-foot long lanes Ryder’s force had cleared.<sup>146</sup>

On the first day of the Anzio breakout, the 1st AD attacked and closed on the coastal Highway 7. In the center, the 3rd ID attack stalled against the Cisterna area defenses and on the right flank, the 1st SSF was reinforced with a battalion from the 133rd Infantry after incurring heavy losses along the Mussolini Canal near Highway 7. Additionally, the 45th ID launched a limited attack in the direction of Campeleone to stabilize the left flank.<sup>147</sup> On May 24, the 1st AD force launched a two-pronged attack towards their objectives of Velletri and Giulianello, while the 34th ID moved north to control a five-mile gap that emerged in their rear area. The 3rd ID renewed their attack and encircled Cisterna, and on the right flank, the 133rd Infantry screened along the Mussolini Canal in preparation for the 1st SSF attack the next day.<sup>148</sup> On May 25, Operation Buffalo’s success appeared imminent as the 1st SSF captured Monte Arrestino south of Cori, the

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<sup>144</sup> Ellis, 409-410.

<sup>145</sup> Fisher, 118.

<sup>146</sup> Ankrum, 490-491. Fisher described the Snakes as an innovation to clear lanes through the mine-wire obstacles of the German beachhead defenses. The explosive filled steel pipes would be towed to the belt and then assembled and pushed forward by tanks to depths of 400 feet. When detonated, the snakes could clear a lane fifteen feet wide and destroy mines to depths of five feet. Fisher, 121.

<sup>147</sup> Fisher, 133-125, 137-138, 141. On May 23, 1944, MG Ryder had three battalions involved in the breakout attack with the 1-135 and 2-135 Infantry in support of CCA 1st AD and a battalion from the 133rd Infantry to relieve the 1st SSF’s 1st Regiment along Highway 7 and the Mussolini Canal.

<sup>148</sup> Fisher, 152.

3rd ID captured Cisterna and Cori, the 1st AD was ten miles from Valmontone, and elements from Clark's II and VI Corps' had linked-up twelve miles south of Cisterna.<sup>149</sup> Along with the collapse of the German Tenth Army in the south, Hitler approved Kesselring's plan to withdraw the LXXVI and XIV Panzer Corps into the Caesar Line south of Rome.<sup>150</sup>

These developments affirmed Clark's determination to disregard Alexander's strategic concept and pivot most of VI Corps' from the Valmontone axis towards "the most direct route to Rome."<sup>151</sup> Historians have debated the motives, decisions, and consequences associated with Clark's decision, but with Alexander's light-handed leadership style, Truscott and his division commanders had neither the time nor the compunction to do anything other than regroup and reorient in stride. Although VI Corps had planned for this sequel, Truscott recorded that it was a drastic change that required a sweeping shift in disposition for the 34th ID.<sup>152</sup> In less than twenty-four hours, Ryder consolidated his dispersed elements by truck and foot movement and had transitioned to the attack towards Lanuvio on the morning of May 26. The 34th ID would clash against the Caesar Line defenses at the southwest base of the Alban Hills until June 3. Nevertheless, the Allied breakout had been a success, and Rome ultimately fell under LTG Clark's Fifth Army control on June 4, 1944. Since leaving the Cassino front in February, MG Ryder had led the 34th ID through multiple changes, operations, and activities to ensure his Red Bulls were ready to fulfill their role in the broader operational plan.

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 152, 172.

<sup>150</sup> Fisher, 152.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 119, 152, 173. Fisher recorded three considerations that led to Clark's decision to disregard Alexander's strategic concepts: Clark wanted to be the first to Rome and to be there before the Operation Overlord invasion relegated the Italian Campaign to a side-show; he wanted "to avoid destructive fighting within the hallowed city; and he was convinced that adhering to Alexander's strategy would deny the Fifth Army the first, and perhaps second goal."

<sup>152</sup> Truscott, 375-376.

## Analysis

MG Ryder demonstrated operational art in shaping and supporting operations after the First Battle of Cassino through the breakout from the Anzio beachhead. This second analysis will examine two elements of operational art to demonstrate how Ryder orchestrated organizational activities in time, space and purpose to contribute to the success of VI Corps' Anzio breakout, and ultimately the capture of Rome. MG Ryder's actions to prepare for and participate in the Anzio breakout illustrate how he applied phasing and transitions, and managed risk to shape conditions and support the broader operational approach.

MG Ryder used phasing to organize the 34th ID activities within the Fifth Army and VI Corps' broader operational approach. US Army doctrine defines a phase as "a planning and execution tool used to divide an operation in duration or activity" and "usually involves a change of mission, task organization, or rules of engagement."<sup>153</sup> Consistent with this contemporary definition, Ryder logically organized and sequenced events necessary for his contribution to the overall operational and strategic objectives. From February to May 1944, Ryder moved the 34th ID through five distinct phases within the overlapping operations of Fifth Army's II and VI Corps, retrograde—refit—movement—defense—offense. Ryder used each phase to accomplish a specific purpose, such as to preserve combat power after culminating, prepare for future operations, shape conditions for the breakout attack, or exploit the success of the breakout.

A retrograde operation is a defensive task that "involves organized movement away from the enemy" within a higher commander's plan and not in isolation.<sup>154</sup> Within the logic of US Army doctrine, a withdrawal is a type of retrograde that disengages a command from an enemy due to a tactical reversal or culmination. Ryder's withdrawal from the Cassino front was a deliberate operation that involved relief by elements of the 2nd New Zealand Corps, movement

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<sup>153</sup> ADRP 3-0, 2-8.

<sup>154</sup> ADRP 3-90, *Offense and Defense* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 4-3.

under pressure to assembly areas, movement to the rear area, and consolidation and reorganization. Considering the challenges presented by the enemy and terrain, absent in the 34th ID record but present in the 4th Indian Division's narrative, this was no small feat.

Ryder's retrograde occurred within his higher commanders' plans, and perhaps this is where the most significant lesson for the operational planner is seen. The transition between the 34th ID and the 4th Indian Division of the 2nd New Zealand Corps was a tactical success, but an operational failure due to the loss of operational tempo because the relief occurred after the 34th ID had culminated. Clark held no reserve on the Cassino front at this point, and Alexander's transition plan failed to position a suitable force or account for the time it would take to transition forces.<sup>155</sup> Ultimately, the retrograde allowed Ryder to transition from brutal offensive operations to refit and prepare his division for the Anzio beachhead.

MG Ryder carefully managed risk during the transitions between phases. Cognitively arranging activities into phases is one thing, implementing transitions between phases is another. Effective transitions "require planning and preparation well before their execution, so the force can maintain the momentum and tempo of operations."<sup>156</sup> This prior planning is required at every echelon, although every echelon necessarily works on different planning horizons. Implicit to all military operations is the element of risk, risk to mission and to force, but nowhere is mission and force more vulnerable than during transitions. If inadequately planned and prepared for, transitions can increase risk jeopardizing tempo and initiative, disintegrating unity of effort, and increasing exposure to enemy systems and observation.

The 34th ID's transition from shaping the VI Corps' defensive line to offensive support and then to a deliberate attack illustrate Ryder's skill in mitigating risk to force and mission through preparation and planning. Even while maintaining the defense for two and a half months,

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<sup>155</sup> Majdalany, 95, 109.

<sup>156</sup> ADRP 3-0, 2-8.



Ryder ensured that the 34th ID was prepared for the Anzio breakout. This involved a thorough understanding of both Truscott's and Clark's plans and intent, although this could be quite guarded in the case of the latter. Ryder also implemented aggressive combat during the so-called Anzio lull, that hardened the division's defense, maintained small unit offensive proficiency (upon which all operational and strategic success is built), and developed an accurate enemy situation. Another important way Ryder mitigated risk to his transitions was through the relationships he forged with his subordinate commanders and division, a process that started in Ireland, June 1942. Ryder, a distinguished and decorated West Point general, communicated with his officers about winning and nowhere in the record is there mention of the animosity that was often seen between MG Fred Walker and the officers of the 36th ID, Texas National Guard.

The Anzio case study serves two purposes in relation to operational art. First it reinforces the symbiotic, yet competing, relationship of the operations at Cassino and Anzio. Secondly, the Anzio case illustrates that operational art is not confined to offensive operations, nor is it solely the domain of the main effort commander. The relevance of phasing and transitions to current and future conflict is unmistakable as the United States marks off its seventeenth year in major combat operations abroad. Successful transitions are achieved through purposeful planning and preparation that maintains operational tempo to accomplish operational and strategic aims.

## Conclusion:

The Italian Campaign emerged out of the Allied strategic debate of 1943 and as Douglas Porch, Naval Post Graduate professor argued, it was, “the European war’s pivotal theater, the critical link without which it would have been impossible for the Western Alliance to go from Dunkirk to Overlord.”<sup>157</sup> The Italian Campaign debate was also pivotal for the US civil-military discourse for a coherent global strategy, the modern Anglo-American relationship, and to Soviet endurance in WW II. The strategic aims of the campaign were straightforward, knock Italy out of the war and contain as many German divisions as possible to shape Europe for a Cross-Channel invasion in 1944. However, the Italian operational environment presented Allied commanders immense challenges in their pursuit of these strategic aims from the weather, the terrain and German fortifications, and extremely competent German commanders.

Within this cauldron, the 34th ID, an activated Midwest National Guard division, fought with the US Fifth Army at the decisive and symbiotic battles of the Italian Campaign—Cassino and Anzio. At the First Battle of Cassino to penetrate the Gustav Line, the 34th ID shifted from the US II Corps’ tertiary supporting role to its main attack and notched out a foothold that would take a substantially larger Allied force three months of fighting to exploit. MG Ryder accomplished these tactical gains that contributed to the broader operational and strategic goals at the Gustav Line by modifying his operational approach, extending his operational reach, and delaying the 34th ID’s culmination by extending his organization’s endurance.

The 34th ID transitioned to the Anzio beachhead a month later to shape the defensive front through which the US VI Corps would break out. From the Cassino front to the Anzio breakout to the US VI Corps’ abrupt shift towards Rome, Ryder led the 34th ID through five distinct phases that were critical to his division’s preparedness in the broader operational approach. Ryder

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<sup>157</sup> Douglas Porch, *The Path to Victory: The Mediterranean Theater in World War II* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2004), 661-662.

accomplished this through anticipating and planning for transitions and mitigating risk to his mission and his force.

Ryder's actions in these two battles of the Italian Campaign offer much to the contemporary operational artist and military planner. First, flexibility to shift assigned roles within the operational framework is vital to maintaining operational tempo. Second, the US Army must improve its ability to operate at all levels in complex terrain and conditions that degrade technological advantages. Third, the hardships and initiative of the individual soldiers that fought at Cassino and Anzio serves as an inspiration to the decisive role that the human dimension contributes to operational success. Finally, navigating organizations through changes requires planning and preparation to ensure seamless transitions and continuity of effort in the operational approach. Nearly seventy-five years have passed since the battles at Cassino, but contemporary combat formations contending with austere, rapidly changing, and technology degraded environments contend with the same fundamental challenges that MG Ryder and the 34th ID faced in the battles at Cassino and Anzio.

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